THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

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EDGE

DREAMCAST ■ PLAYSTATION ■ NINTENDO 64 ■ PC ■ ARCADE ■ ONLINE



Elixir lifts the iron curtain on Republic

A million unique characters + an infinite polygon engine = the future of gaming?

Previewed Phantasy Star Online | SNK Vs Capcom | GT2000 | GT2 | GP3 | Jet:X | Crazy Taxi | Parasite Eve II

Reviewed Biohazard 3 | Rally Championship | Tomb Raider IV | F1 World Grand Prix | F1 '99 | Win Back



E **dge** staff see new slabs of software every day of the week, often in the shadow of PR folk eager to sell their wares as being capable of changing the world in some way or another. Harsh reality, however, dictates that every day is a disappointment as game X fails to deliver a physics engine that perfectly simulates the muscle structure of the human form, and game Y falls down in its efforts to be the 3D platform game to finally knock *Super Mario 64* off its pedestal.

This is why early word from Elixir Studios concerning its first project was received with caution, especially in light of the gravity of the company's claims. One million unique characters. Microscopically detailed simulation of an entire country. *An infinite polygon engine*. It's programmer pub talk.

Or so it seemed. Upon visiting Elixir's Camden offices – without a PR executive in tow – it became evident that Demis Hassabis and his crew were being entirely fair about the giant steps they are making towards simulating reality in a computer game environment. Their baby, *Republic*, is still in the embryonic stages of development, but, crucially, the technology to lend credence to Elixir's bold claims is in place. You'll find the full report from this most refreshing of company visits on p44.

Now, if only every videogame developer had the ammunition to match its ambition...

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PC 3D: THE NEXT GENERATION



Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

DREAMCAST FINALLY REACHES EAGER EURO GAMEHEADS

UK launch looks positive while Sega storms US despite problems, but continues to suffer apathy in home territory







Just a couple of weeks before the UK launch, Sega finally revealed its European Dreamcast Web browser. Dreamarena – as the homepage is to be known – comes with free email and Web surfing

Sega has finally completed Dreamcast's turbulent global rollout, 11 months after first launching the console in Japan. As **Edge** went to press, UK preorders topped 40,000, which is around a tenth of the total number of units Sega predicts it will have sold within a year. Consumer interest in the console had been strong in the weeks prior to October 14, and a special press event on October 5 attracted everyone from *Smash Hits* to the *Sunday Times* and women's magazine *Red*. Sega also revealed that 43 PAL titles would be released by Christmas. However, TV advertising for the console only kicked off a week prior to launch and ads featuring ingame action aren't scheduled until November.

Retail outlets were upbeat in the run-up, though. Dixons, HMV and Blockbuster had all been heavily advertising Dreamcast, while Electronics Boutique arranged for over 100 of its UK branches to open at midnight on October 13. Most impressive were the efforts of the Oxford Street Virgin Megastore, which renamed itself Virgin Segastore for the day. It was also the centre of Sega's London launch celebrations, with celebrity boxers Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn squaring up for a bout of Midway's *Ready 2 Rumble*.

However, in the midst of all the excitement some retailers expressed concerns that they would quickly run out of stock. And it seems likely that customers who didn't preorder the console would experience problems tracking one down. Peripherals, especially steering wheels, were also expected to be be short supply.

American triumph

The excitement surrounding the UK launch comes after a spectacular period for Sega in the US. After a fortnight on sale, SOA announced laudable Dreamcast sales of over 500,000







The Dreamcast US launch is a real success story in true Hollywood style: 514,000 units in two weeks eclipses previous North American hardware launches, a fact Sega has been shouting from the rooftops. Retailers in the States are even expecting hardware shortages in the run-up to the vital Christmas period

units. The company was quick to boast that it took PlayStation four months, and N64 two months to reach this level – an encouraging if slightly misleading statistic considering the difference in market conditions between the three launches.

Typically for Sega, however, not all went quite according to plan in the US. A duplication error, traced back to a single CD cutter in one of the company's four manufacturing plants, meant that thousands of faulty games (both first and thirdparty – some US stores claim to have had over 90 per cent returns on faulty copies of *Ready 2 Rumble*) and Web browsers went out to American homes in the launch week. Furthermore, several hundred consumers who preordered Dreamcasts from Sega's own online service did not receive their machines on the launch day. SOA reacted quickly to this, however, offering free copies of *VF3tb* to anyone forced to wait a few days before receiving their machine. Ultimately, though, these slight disappointments did little to dampen a launch period that benefited from extensive media coverage.

Software trials

In contrast to optimism in the west, Sega Enterprises of Japan has suffered a difficult couple of months. With sales still chugging along at a less than impressive rate, September 30 saw the release of *Shenmue* being pushed back from October 28 to spring 2000 (though rumours of a possible December 17 appearance are currently circulating). Not surprisingly, blame for the delay has been placed on the sheer complexity of the title. Two specific areas have been mentioned: the detailed AI routines grafted to dozens of the nonplayer characters, and the realtime weather system which governs the game's varied climate (an impressive but not breathtaking element).

What is strange is that the delay announcement came barely a month before the title was due to ship. Surely if deep-seated problems with the code itself were to blame, Sega would have known several weeks prior that the October date would not be met. Either there is a severe lack of communication between marketing and development departments or Sega deliberately withheld the delay announcement to ensure RPG-mad otaku purchased machines in anticipation of the game's release. Whatever the case, developing for the machine is obviously proving more difficult than many expected. Another long-awaited title, *Biohazard Code: Veronica*, has also been subject to a lengthy delay in Japan (although, in a positive turn, Capcom has announced it will reveal four new DC games before the end of the year), which means the DC's software library is still top heavy with sports sims and arcade conversions, and severely lacking in deeper gameplay experiences. The recent official unveiling of Sony's PlayStation2 hardware should serve as a reminder to Sega that it has only a limited time to establish a strong catalogue of must-have games. A successful US launch will not be enough to secure the future.



Dreamcast urgently needs machine-specific triple-A product, but developers seem to be experiencing problems. *Biohazard: Code Veronica* is now delayed until next year

UK preorders topped 40,000, which is around a tenth of the total number of units Sega predicts it will have sold within a year. Consumer interest in the console had been strong in the weeks leading up to October 14





Domestic apathy towards Dreamcast will not be helped by the fact that *Shenmue* has been delayed until spring 2000. The game was set to be a crucial winter release for Sega

MILIA 2000 PREPARES TO GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

Date set for interactive software showcase as European game developers begin looking to Cannes

WEB SMART

Milia 2000 will also be running a series of seminars and events for online content developers. In the words of the official press release, 'Professionals of major worldwide Internet companies, start-ups and traditional media groups will in concrete terms examine content development and business models connections, and give you a clear perspective on how to improve your professional sharpness!' Talks will cover online communities, creating successful content, and the big topic of the moment, ecommerce.



This year's Milia, held in February, was the biggest to date, but plans are afoot to make 2000's a significantly weightier affair. Representatives from every major European player, including Edge, will be in attendance

It's four months away but preparations are already well underway for next year's Milia event – the interactive software equivalent of the Cannes film festival, organised to pair up publishers with developers of games, Websites and multimedia software.

Taking place from February 14-18 at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, the show will once again feature several components aimed specifically at game development, including last year's successful addition, the Game Developer Village. Here, dev studios are able to hire low-cost mini-booths at just FF3,500 (approx. £350) a throw, and show off their latest projects to prospective moneymen. There will also be a special Developer Lounge where, according to Milia press manager **Armelle Coatsaliou**, "Developers will be able to present their projects on free access computers, meet their future publishers or future employers, make appointments, or simply network."

One of the highlights of a special series of seminars under the heading 'Business Skills for Developers' will be Tim Stamper of Rare discussing how to build good relationships with a publisher

Opportunity knocks

The chief aim of the show is to give developers the opportunity to show off their wares, or even better, to sell them to established publishers. However, it's also about preparing the 'creative people' for the rough and tumble business of game publishing. February 16, for example, will see a special series of seminars under the heading 'Business Skills for Developers': highlights are set to include Tim Stamper of Rare discussing how to build good relationships with a publisher, plus talks on pitching your idea to a publisher, managing a development studio, and marketing.

Most interesting, though, is a discussion entitled 'New Technology – Chasing the Dream'. This will set out to ask whether or not developers are wasting the opportunities afforded by new consoles by writing the same tired games

ENTERING NEW TALENT NOW

Anyone interested in the New Talent Now section of Milia 2000 can download the rules and regulations from http://www.milia.com/events/ntalent.shtml. Deadline is currently set at November 17 1999. Before you rush online, read the entry conditions:

1. The project must be created and developed by a student or a group of students that has attended a New Media course or an affiliate Research programme at an educational institute during the years 1998/1999 or 1999/2000.

2. The submitted project must have been chosen and selected by the course director.

3. Participation is limited to one project per course, or two projects if one is online.

4. The project must not have previously been selected for a prior edition of the New Talent Competition.





This year's event (above), held in February, played host to a number of illustrious attendees (right), and served as a platform for Sega's Euro evangelists (below right)



with better graphics rather than conceiving innovative gameplay ideas. (The answer seems painfully obvious.)

Another important Milia regular is also set to reappear next year. The New Talent Competition (previously known as New Talent Pavilion) invites students on multimedia courses to submit interactive software projects to a panel of international experts. The 20 winners will then be given the opportunity to present their projects to industry professionals in a dedicated area of the Palais des Festivals during the event – an opportunity which has naturally led to lucrative employment for previous winners. Project designers will also get their hotels paid for, and can invite five other students and their course leader to the show for free.

Details on other speakers and seminars will emerge through these pages closer to the event itself. One interesting aspect, though, is the emphasis Milia 2000 will be placing on developing games for emergent platforms. Here, the event is billed as 'the perfect venue to network with management from complementary fields including Broadband Internet, Digital Broadcast, Cable and Interactive TV'. Convergence is a big part of the event's focus, then, which should present a number of intriguing propositions.

NINTENDO ROCKED BY **PROFIT DROP**

Half-year figures show disappointing performance as rumours surround Dolphin

The next eight months seem likely to be difficult ones for Nintendo following its recent set of financial figures, a state of affairs that widespread rumours concerning delays to its Dolphin console will do nothing to improve.

Nintendo is still insisting, however, that Dolphin will debut during the next Spaceworld in August, even though this would only be two months before its official Japanese release.

NCL's half-year profits dropped 72% to £114m. President Yamauchi-san blamed this on foreign exchange losses from money banked in the US, and the rising strength of the yen.

Behind the scenes Nintendo is also continuing to try and convince thirdparty developers that it will not repeat the mistakes made with the N64. Most recently, it added 3D chip manufacturer S3 to its technology partners list. S3's texture-compression techniques are used in Dolphin's graphics chip. Meanwhile, development sources have confirmed to **Edge** that Nintendo's format is friendlier than PS2.



NCL's Kyoto HQ has been buzzing following a drop in profits, but work on Dolphin continues apace

CUTTINGS

Neo-Geo advances too
Following Nintendo's news concerning the 32bit Game Boy Advance, SNK has confirmed that it too is developing a 32bit successor to its Neo-Geo Pocket Color handheld. SNK's UK MD **Robbie Philips** commented: "We will make an announcement at E3. All I'm prepared to say now is that it's 32bit and will be the successor to the Neo-Geo."

Molyneux's satellites signed
Activision has won the race to publish the first games to be produced under Lionhead's satellite programme. But the debut releases from the Big Blue Box and Intrepid studios aren't expected until the end of 2000 at the earliest. The ambitious publisher has also acquired Neversoft, the codeshop behind *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* and a forthcoming game based on the *Spider-Man* licence, for 700,000 Activision shares.

PlayStation2 opens up
The cross-platform potential of PlayStation2 was given a boost thanks to the addition of an optimised version of OpenGL to Sony's middleware program. Developed by Data Plus, in conjunction with Silicon Graphics, the graphics API should make the porting of PC titles a smoother proposition.

Secondhand banned
The latest round in the ongoing battle between the Japanese Association for Computer Software and shops that sell secondhand games has been lost by the retailers. The Osaka District Court has ordered two chainstores to stop selling used software. The ruling contradicts one made by the Tokyo District Court in a similar case in May.

Virgin taken by Titus
The wondergarçons of the French Bourse, the Caen Brothers, have continued to cut a swathe through the games industry with the completion of their takeover of Virgin. Titus already owned 44% of Virgin, thanks to its controlling stake in Virgin's partner Interplay. It has now acquired a 50.1% in Virgin. The cost was not disclosed.

PRESCREEN

EDGE PREMIERES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT'S FRESHEST FACES

"Here's one I made earlier..."

Castigating the sins within sequeldom

At the time of writing, the great if occasionally petulant *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* has been on sale but a week, yet already news has arrived that developer Neversoft is working on a sequel. This sort of occurrence is hardly rare – ATD announced details of a *Rollcage* sequel *before* the original had reached the shops, for example. But it is indicative of the way game development is changing.

Sequels are far from being a new concept – Taito took little time in producing *Space Invaders Part II*, after all – but other than EA, few publishers churned out yearly updates of their titles during the 16bit era. The trend took hold during the 32bit age, and it would be easy to point the finger at the PlayStation. Yet it's hardly the fault of Sony's machine. Gamers barely had the time to get their consoles out of the packaging before publishers began announcing sequels to the early wave of PlayStation titles. As the userbase grew, lukewarm sequels sold in substantial quantities, encouraging publishers to continue their business models.

More than merely affecting gamers' spending habits, this state of affairs has also seriously affected the development philosophy of many software houses. Rather than endeavouring to cram everything into one title in order to make it as perfect a representation of its genre as possible, a growing number of developers **Edge** has spoken to now talk of holding features back to be "implemented in the sequel." Few codeshops still regard a current project as a singular enterprise, requiring a team's utter dedication to improve every aspect to make it stand out from the dross. Nowadays, everyone wants a franchise.

Even Nintendo, that most respected of developers, releases sequels, of course, but at least it takes the time to ensure new ideas and improvements are added rather than simply throwing in 'leftovers' from an original concept.

An example of old-skool sequel etiquette can be found on page 31, where Geoff Crammond's latest, only his third F1 game after almost nine years, is previewed. By comparison, with *F1'99* Psygnosis has released its fourth such title in four years. And which of the two racers would gamers more happily sell vital organs for?

Resisting the financial urge to release yearly updates builds real anticipation among the gameplaying community. Crucially, though, it allows legitimate improvements to made, which ultimately can only benefit all concerned.





From left: the nth version of EA's most profitable yet exploitative franchise, ATD's *Rollcage* (the sequel was in the works long before the original's release), and a sequel the way it should be done, *Zelda III*

Edge's most wanted

Filtering the flow for juicy prospects

			
Republic	**Jet Set Radio**	**Chu Chu Rocket**	**Gran Turismo 2**
(PC) Eidos	**(Dreamcast) Sega**	**(Dreamcast) Sega**	**(PlayStation) SCEI**
Much is written about it elsewhere in this issue, but such is the scale of Elixir's first project that it's impossible not to start counting down to Jan '02.	Without doubt one of the most interesting things shown at September's Tokyo Game Show, **Edge** is eager to try out this unusually presented title.	It had its work cut out garnering attention at Sega's packed booth at TGS, but those who did give it a crack found an unusually addictive game.	Yes, it still has cars. Yes, it doesn't look too dissimilar to the previous game. Regardless, you're not likely to find a better racing game this year.

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PRESCREEN ALPHAS

IN AN UNDENIABLY RACY SECTION THIS MONTH, EDGE TAKES THE PACK LEADERS FOR A SPIN

GRAN TURISMO 2000

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **POLYPHONY DIGITAL**























In terms of handling, *GT2000* naturally offers a more complex set of dynamics than either of its PlayStation-based siblings, as **Edge** found out at the recent Tokyo Game Show (see p52). The environments are currently still a long way from finished, which only enhances the overly shiny nature of the cars. With *GT2* destined to arrive some three months before this PS2 version of Polyphony's astounding reality-loving racer, it will be interesting to see how car-tuning-obsessed Japanese videogamers receive both versions.

GRAN TURISMO 2

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **POLYPHONY DIGITAL**

Another batch of screenshots before *GT2*'s expected November 25 Japanese release gives a minute glimpse into the range of vehicles that have been crammed into the two-disc package. **Edge** has found the reaction to the game by some individuals expecting unrealistic improvements infuriating. This title was always going to be an evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) step from its superlative predecessor – the PlayStation can only do so much.





















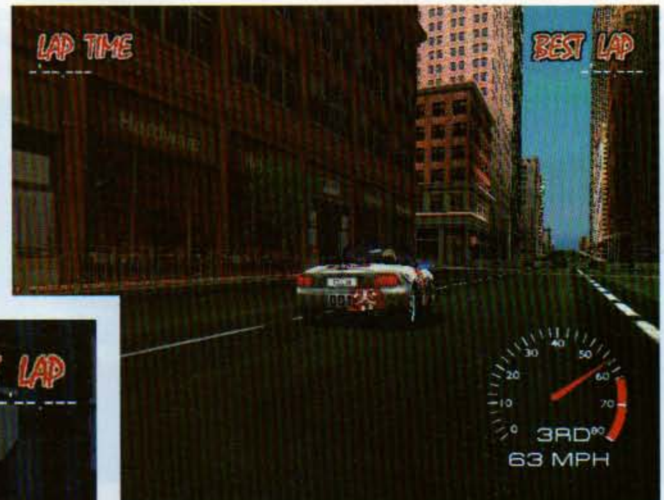


steal

METROPOLIS STREET RACER

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **BIZARRE CREATIONS**













Bizarre Creations' recently released shots (including the first non-replay footage) from *Metropolis Street Racer* show a selection of sections from the game's three city-based circuits, namely Tokyo, San Francisco and London. The departure of a key team member earlier in the year has undoubtedly played a part in the game's delay, though given the quality of the scenes depicted here, progress would appear to continue reasonably on track. Hopefully the handling problems **Edge** experienced at E3 will have been sorted out in time for the release early next year.

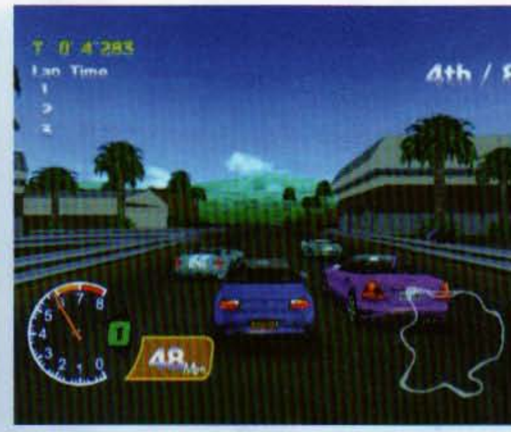
ROADSTERS

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST/PS/N64/PS2** DEVELOPER: **TITUS**









Having one of the lowest profiles of all forthcoming racing titles is probably down to *Roadsters* spreading itself so thinly – versions are expected for N64, PlayStation2, PS2 and Dreamcast (version shown). With this title Titus will become the first western publisher to launch PlayStation2 product in Japan, bringing licensed cars to the mix. Unusually, each vehicle features a functional mileometer, although its gameplay importance remains unclear.

PREHISTORIC ISLE 2

FORMAT: **COIN-OP** DEVELOPER: **SNK**

However much polygon-pushing power is thrown down in front of developers, some of them steadfastly refuse to take the bait, and so it is that SNK has elected to update its late-'80s shoot 'em up coin-op, continuing its resolutely 2D approach. While the original presented biplanes against dinosaur foes, this sequel offers the more technologically advanced helicopters. With a ten-digit scoreline, expect shooting action like it used to be.



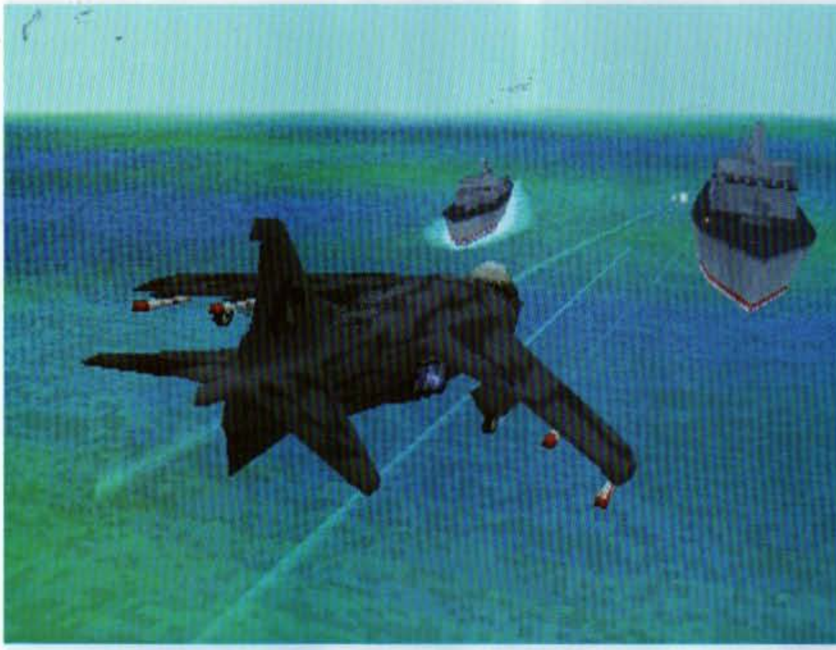






EAGLE ONE: HARRIER ATTACK

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **GLASS GHOST**








Last seen in **E**71, this relatively dazzling example of PlayStation coding comes courtesy of an odd hotchpotch of veteran programmers who began to work on it during the Amiga's heyday with the help of former military personnel. Not that there's anything remotely 16bit about this arcade-style flight game, though, which promises 'Hollywood-style action'. Past experience makes it hard to get too excited about air combat, though **Edge** is willing to be proved wrong come January.

CRISIS ZONE

While twoplayer coin-op *Time Crisis 2* improved on the original with an refreshing cooperative slant, this third arcade instalment introducing fully automatic weaponry looks comparatively bland. Background detail is perhaps the most notable element of the game, with just about everything offering itself up for destruction (one newsagents scene can get especially messy). With accuracy falling by the wayside, this coin-op is all about balls-out action.




VIEWPOINT 2064

FORMAT: **N64** DEVELOPER: **SAMMY**

Following in the slipstream of *Giga Wing* as a full-on shoot 'em up, the Neo-Geo classic has been passed across to the N64, camera movements from the isometric original changing in the process. Oddly, the new slants applied to the title have drawn some uncanny comparisons with *StarFox 64*. The targeting system is also a significant gameplay alteration.









CASTLEVANIA: SPECIAL EDITION

FORMAT: **N64** DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**









With the enjoyable yet ultimately disappointing first 64bit outing behind it, the *Castlevania* franchise is attempting another onslaught on Nintendo's machine. A playable version could be found among Konami's ECTS offerings in September, but these more recent shots show a more advanced state of play from the game. Plot details are presently sketchy, although Konami appears to be keen to introduce a healthy dose of lycanthropy to the mix. Of more concern to the company should be fine-tuning the game's camera and smoothing out the fiddly bits that marred the first title.

STREET FIGHTER III W IMPACT

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**

As Dreamcast's beat 'em up library grows courtesy of Namco, Sega and Capcom, the latter has elected to convert the least significant title in the *Street Fighter* series albeit with added Dreamcast bonuses. Presumably, only hardcore lovers of the genre will opt to obtain both this and the imminent *SNK Vs Capcom* title, but at least Sega's machine is wasting no time in gaining a reputation as the beat 'em up platform of choice, just like the Saturn before it.









GIGA WING

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**





Having already attracted a cult following in arcades, Capcom's extravagant vertically scrolling shooter is poised to make its Dreamcast debut in Japan soon. Playable by one or two players simultaneously, the game offers traditional fire and smart bomb controls, although in this instance it's possible to hold down the former to create a shield capable of deflecting enemy shots. This function is an absolute necessity given the preposterous amount of projectiles on screen.













DEE DEE PLANET

Cynical types may see *Dee Dee Planet* as little more than Sega desperately trying to achieve an online userbase with a simple and addictive title, but the title allows up to four players to take part in an experience reminiscent of *Death Tanks*, Lobotomy's classic multiplayer Saturn shoot 'em up (itself an update of *Tanx*). Sega intends to introduce more graphically undemanding titles like this for its Simple Network series.





TOY FIGHTERS

FORMAT: **COIN-OP** DEVELOPER: **SEGA**

One of the less prominent titles displayed by Sega during JAMMA, *Toy Fighters* in the latest in the company's interminable line of 3D fighters. Fans may be disappointed by the stylings of the new game, which utilises a less stern approach, resulting in some rather lightweight, forgettable characters.











JET SET RADIO

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **SEGA**

Easily one of Tokyo Game Show's (see p52) most intriguing offerings, Sega's latest music-based was sadly not playable. However, at this stage **Edge** is particularly interested in finding out who's responsible for achieving the game's stunning cartoon-coated polygonal aesthetics. Expect a March release.






VIRTUAL ON ORATORIO TANGRAM

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **SEGA**








This mouthful of a title signals the Dreamcast pseudo-sequel to Sega's popular arcade and Saturn game, and it looks like it's finally being done justice in the home, utilising a dual-stick controller and an option to link Dreamcasts. Head-to-head battles and extremely tidy visuals should make this one of the strongest DC titles to emerge from Japan of late.

WARCRAFT III

It's the world's first RPS (roleplaying strategy) game, according to senior producer Rob Pardo, the difference being the importance of characters in the now-3D *Warcraft* world. Heroes are required to lead troops, and the base building that characterised the previous games has been toned down. An expanded multiplayer option with gameplay in the vein of *Team Fortress* is promised, too, as are level design tools. Blizzard expects it to ship in late 2000.





RENT A HERO NO.1

The Dreamcast action-RPG genre is to be given a boost by the curiously titled *Rent A Hero No.1*. The game, actually a sequel to a Mega Drive title, places a young 'hero' inside a mecha-style battle suit. The RPG element involves exploring cities and is juxtaposed with the arcade-friendly battle mode which shifts gameplay into the realm of the 3D beat 'em up. Sega devotees may spot similarities to coin-op *Spikeout*, released earlier this year.





LE MANS 24 HOUR

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION/PC** DEVELOPER: **EUTECHNYX**

After a quiet period away from the limelight, *Le Mans 24 Hour* returns in improved style. The handling of the PlayStation version shown here has been improved since **Edge** last saw the game in March. The array of options, circuit accuracy and overall attention to detail should give circuit racing fans a reasonable alternative to the current F1 overload.











RALLY MASTERS

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION/PC/N64** DEVELOPER: **DIGITAL ILLUSIONS**









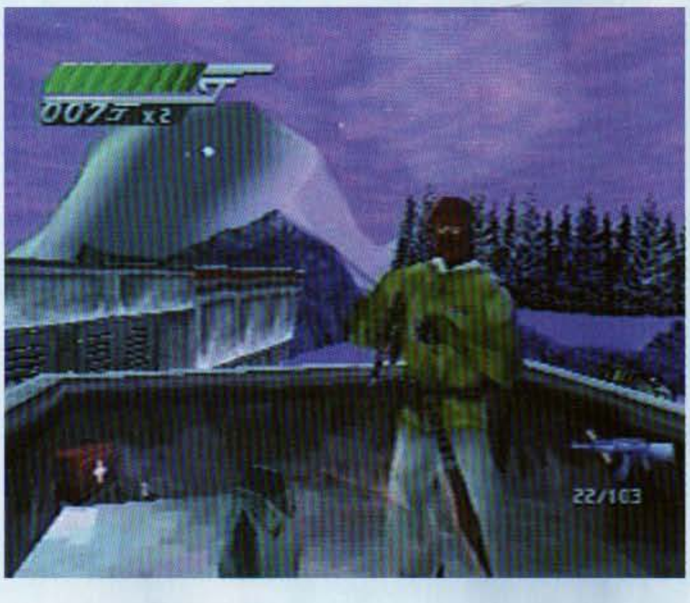
Digital Illusions' delayed project (Infogrames' Gremlin takeover has seen the latter's signed product wait patiently in line while the French giant carried out its planned *V-Rally 2* release) is nearly ready to ship. These latest PlayStation shots show considerable vehicle detail, and hopefully the playability will match the potential long shown by its PC sibling.



TOMORROW NEVER DIES

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **BLACK OPS**

While less concerned with following plot than the N64's *GoldenEye* (it's hard to recall a skiing scene in the forgettable celluloid version of 'Tomorrow Never Dies'), this seems to have been in development for longer than anyone cares to remember. Still, at best it should be capable of competing with genre stablemates *Mission: Impossible* and *Syphon Filter*. As far as polish goes, though, don't expect anything world-shatteringly accomplished.







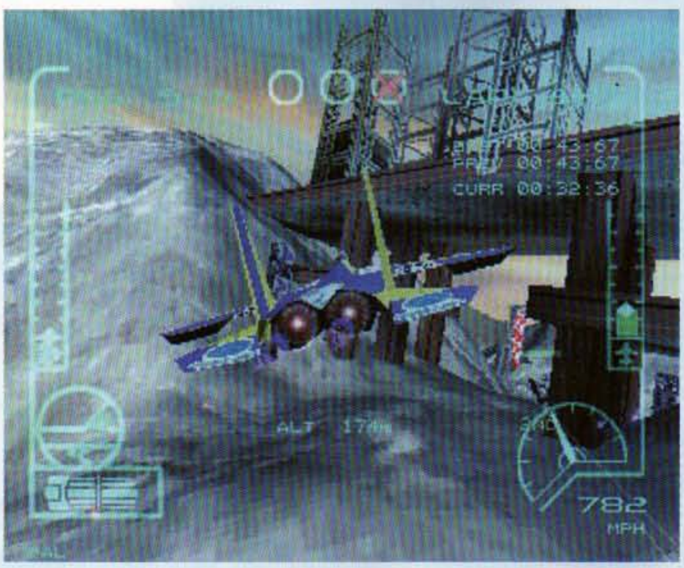
JET:X

Q: What happens when one of the most successful UK development teams gets bored of working on the sequel of the genre they invented? A: They leave to make a game that goes faster









A splitscreen mode is one of the options introduced to maximise replayability



Flying very low and very fast are the two fundamentals in winning races in *Jet:X*

When Curly Monsters started work on its first game, currently labouring under the working title *Jet:X*, the design concept was blatantly simple. "We jokingly called it 'Jet Turismo'," recalls producer **Andy Satterthwaite**. But after a few months, the joke became serious. Curly Monsters realised taking everything it liked about *Gran Turismo* and adding the speed of racing jet fighters around low-level circuits could make for a hugely exciting game. And this, combined with the experience all six members gained working on the revolutionary *Wipeout* series while at Psygnosis, suggests *Jet:X* has the potential to be very good indeed.

For a start, it offers two basic modes. "There is an arcade option in which you don't have to worry about buying planes and all that stuff, but it's the cowards' way out," Satterthwaite argues. The structure of the championship mode borrows *Gran Turismo's* concept of starting with enough money to buy the slowest, unmodified plane and working your way to the top. Players also have to earn flying licences and pass exams to gain access to different races. As money is won, so planes can be upgraded to make them faster and stronger, or equipped with weapons or stealth capabilities.

Another crucial aspect that will separate casual and hardcore gamers is the handling, which exists in two forms. The arcade mode operates just like a car, with left and right, up and down working to an universal axis, no matter

The tracks are optimised for extremely low-level flying. Altitude is one of the key features. The lower you fly, the faster the plane goes

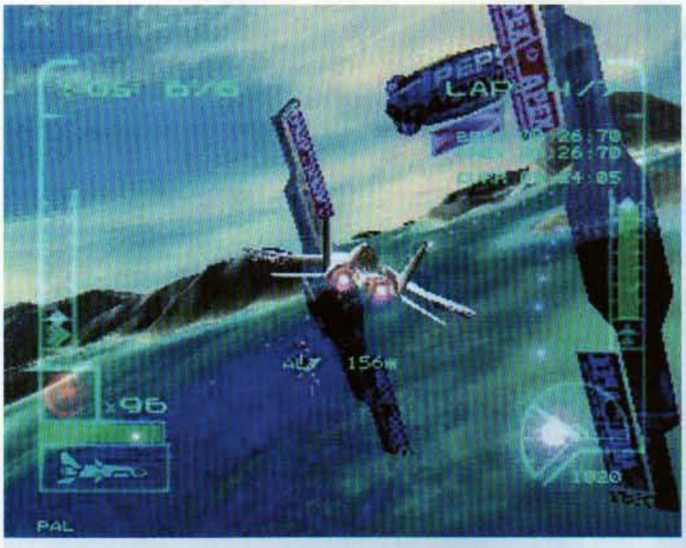
Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Infogrames**

Developer: **Curly Monsters**

Release: **March**

Origin: **UK**





The two lines of flashing lights mark the boundary of the racing area. After three seconds outside, an autopilot bring wayward planes back. Each level also has checkpoints which must be flown through. The left-hand HUD bar displays health, while the right indicates afterburner level and weapons







There are 38 different types of planes, ranging from trainers to exotic X fighters such as the forward-swept wing X-29 and the pilotless HiMAT drone

what the orientation of the plane. Pro handling, however, maps the commands to the plane's actual orientation, making it far harder to control, although it's the only way to complete the game.

"The idea is, from putting the disc in a PlayStation, that if you press X, X, X, X, you will start on an easy track with the easiest aircraft," explains designer **Nick Burcombe**. "But at the backend it's possibly the hardest game I've ever played." But, as he knows, for a game to be successful, developers need to cater for both levels. "There are always people who are going to be much better gameplayers than we are," he confesses. "There were people on *Wipeout 2097* who phoned up within a day and said, 'It's too easy – I've finished it'."

Curly Monsters is trying hard to make sure it doesn't happen this time. The introduction of a freeflight air combat arena will help, as should the size of the championship mode. Starting with trainers, players move up through fighters and superfighters to the elite X fighters.

The aircraft are not organised around manufacturers as in *Gran Turismo*; *Jet:X* displays its heritage with *Wipeout*-style country-organised dealerships. And, in a neat move, the dealerships only sell the types of aircraft that their countries manufacture in real life. Thus only the French will offer Mirages, and Swedes the Drakan.

The 14 racing tracks themselves are optimised for extremely low-level flying. In fact altitude is one of the key features of the game as the lower you fly, the faster the plane goes. Anyone expecting to win a race will need to be flying in sub-100m conditions. Conversely, the ceiling of 1,000m is enforced by making a plane's airspeed bleed off, creating stall conditions at that height. The lateral boundary of the racing area is also well defined by two lines of flashing lights. A certain amount of latitude is allowed, however, as planes can remain outside the area for up to three seconds before an autopilot cuts in and guides them back to the racing line. This procedure adds depth to the game, as tracks have been designed with potential shortcuts.

Current work concentrates on signing up a DJ for the music, and working with a design agency to complete the overall look. But this aside, Burcombe refutes suggestions that *Jet:X* is a reminiscent of his 'other' game. "Obviously it's an airborne racing game so people are going to say it's *Wipeout*, but we don't think it feels or plays or has the structure of *Wipeout*," he explains. Perhaps the more pertinent question is, will it be as successful?



If planes climb and gain too much altitude, their airspeed drops off and they stall downwards. The critical ceiling for all levels is 1,000m

CRAZY TAXI

One of the first arcade machines to use the Naomi board, *Crazy Taxi* was always going to make the journey to Dreamcast. But can Sega bring the title home with equal success?



The ever-present directional arrows are a necessity for city navigation when faced with such plainly hectic and outright dangerous situations such as this







Your car frequently leaves the Tarmac for unfeasible lengths of time. The fare meter (seen at the top right) is hit if your driving is especially sloppy





Fans of *Driver* will spot the similarities in blitzing through a variety of aesthetically impressive obstacle props such as wooden packing crates (above)

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **January (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Speeding down the streets of San Francisco with total disregard for fellow drivers might sound like an early *Driver* level, but chances are you were doing this long before Reflections' game appeared – in an arcade. The brilliantly novel *Crazy Taxi* saw players striving to satisfy a city full of eager cab hailing residents, and it is now, finally, Dreamcast bound.

The colourful inner-city atmosphere seems to have been ported over without significant alteration, although the handling physics have been changed slightly. The Dreamcast pad is a lot more responsive and satisfying to use than the loose wheel of the arcade machine, and Sega is acutely aware of the differing demands of the console user – Dreamcast *Sega Rally 2*, for example, was a massively reworked title from the arcade original. Sega has stated that DC *Taxi* will offer new options, but has so far confirmed only a single extra level.

The one-city original will be hideously shortlived, though, if new environs aren't supplied to satisfy both fans and a market which has been enthralled by *Driver* and the lesser, but similar, PlayStation titles *Felony 11-79* and the mountain bike-based *Courier Crisis*. The underlying importance of *Crazy Taxi* is that by its originality and (hopefully) popularity, it will push the Dreamcast away from the troublesome prospect of a two-genre software catalogue consisting of beat 'em ups and racing games.

The outlandish spins and '70s-style car jumping of *Crazy Taxi* will appeal to those who lust after hi-octane arcade thrills. The colourful cast of characters and thrash metal soundtrack complement the hectic business of passenger collection, and add much to the overall tension of meeting a ride's self-imposed deadline.

Potential customers are divided into three classes of priority, signified by the time-honoured device of colour coding, and it's down to your swift on-the-spot appraisal of available customers to make sure that demand is satisfied according to priority.

With this and *Super Runabout* (see **E**77) in the offing, it's clear that Dreamcast owners are in for a bundle of riotous rides.





Taking your taxi off-road is an element inherent to the game's huge appeal

PARASITE EVE II

Aya Brea, star of Square's classy cinematic RPG adventure from 1998, is preparing for her return in a millennial sequel, currently in development by a new team







Brea immediately knows what she is up against this time, hence the SWAT-style team and addition of firearms, not to mention spell-based attacks



Brea no longer has to display a combat dome before attacking, enabling some much quicker action than the RPG basis would initially suggest



Cut-scenes still ape the extreme close-ups and camera direction that *Resident Evil* instigated. *Parasite Eve II*'s methods are less obvious, though

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SquareSoft**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **November (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Aya Brea, the central character in *Parasite Eve*, introduced Square's style of arcade RPG adventure to the mass market in the wake of *Final Fantasy VII*. The self-consciously American detective story was lavished with cut-scenes and realistic characters that arguably prompted Square to abandon cartoon styling in favour of *Parasite Eve*-esque visuals for *FFVIII*. Here, in a surprise sequel, you are once again placed in control of Brea.

The Mitochondria virus that caused havoc in the first game, creating genetic mutations and 'Ghost Busters II' levels of paranormal hysteria, is back, too. The action has switched from New York to LA, and the US government has set up an assault team to deal with possible outbreaks of the virus. Brea heads the team, who appear in a similar format to the original's now-clichéd synergy of rendered backgrounds and polygonal characters. Strangely, the original development team and character designer aren't involved with this project – a new team has been given the title as its debut project. Square's statement that the game leans towards adventure rather than action means that the horrific cut-scenes should continue. The cinematic feel of the original – achieved by inviting 'Apollo 13' film staff and personnel involved in the Japanese 'Parasite Eve' film to work on the game – is already in place, and the title seems like a chapter in an ongoing story, subscribing fully to its literary roots.

Parasite Eve II negates being labelled a dodgy FMV-style interactive adventure by sampling the once-ingenious traits of *Resident Evil* and taking a leaf out of *Silent Hill*'s book before diving headfirst into an intriguing but unoriginal continuation of the first game's plot. The US translation is due next year, but **Edge** wonders if a PlayStation2 *Final Fantasy* game might eclipse it altogether. Perhaps it might be a good idea to grant the sequel the UK airing its precursor did not enjoy.



Rendered backdrops are more lively than the bleak terrains of the original game





Mutations are still unavoidable, but Square's artists make sure that you see them in horrific detail, as this cheeky lass demonstrates (above)

THE REAL NEVERENDING STORY

Making use of the themes made popular by a multimillion-selling novel, a German devco is using proprietary technology to bring a world to life in digital form











MonsterEngine 1.0 handles both indoor and exterior locations with equal flair. Developer discreet monsters is looking into possibly licensing its 3D technology



Though not shown here, the game's engine can handle 3D weather, which allows for believable rain effects, heightening the atmosphere





Six degrees of view freedom are offered, while players can navigate locations in either sneak, walk or run movement mode

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **discreet monsters**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **April**

Origin: **Germany**

The first title to come out of discreet monsters, a burgeoning codeshop based in the centre of Munich, *The Real Neverending Story* is based on Michael Ende's novel, *The Neverending Story*, which readers may recall was made into a kids' movie in the '80s.

Despite such subject matter, however, not every element of the game is childlike. Using the developer's own MonsterEngine 1.0, this is an adventure which generates massive 3D scenes offering seamless transition between indoor and outdoor locations. Seeing this technology in action, it's difficult not to be impressed: approaching and subsequently entering an imposing tower construction set among sprawling landscape, there is no hitch as the technology immediately generates its complex interior, going so far as to even calculate geometry *à la Quake III* among the architecture within. Walking across to a window inside, a peek outside reveals a fully rendered vista rather than the sort of flat bitmap image that might be expected.

Playing as Asura, your task is to overcome the Nothing and save the land of Fantasia. Combat occurs at both closequarters and long range, with around ten weapons to choose from, including some available in sniper mode. However, discreet is keen to emphasise that fighting is not the crux of the experience. But then nor are traditional pull-the-switch puzzles. Instead, discreet has engineered what is terms 'elastic storytelling', which sees players encountering NPCs (of which there are around 200) and engaging in dialogue in order to progress. In total, around 800 pages of script currently exist, and they're played out by making a choice between a selection of 'thoughts', which prompts vocal interaction. It's difficult to see how this will play out within the framework of the game as a whole, but in the snippet **Edge** experienced, it presented an interesting spin on the age-old problem of how to integrate believable character interaction.

While it's obviously targeting the younger set, *The Real Neverending Story* nevertheless presents some interesting technological propositions whose impact on gaming could reach much further afield.



The machine level is rendered in a monochrome fashion in order to distinguish it from the gaudy sections elsewhere

F1 GRAND PRIX 3

Geoff Crammond, racing maestro and one-man programming legend, unveils his first game in three years. Unsurprisingly, it's the third instalment in the *Grand Prix* series







The detail is extraordinary – observe the rendering in the wing mirrors (top)



The major omission from *GP2* was weather. However, a complete system of effects is promised in the sequel, enhancing the importance of pit strategy



Expect to take advantage of a huge range of replays and alternative viewpoints, not to mention a LAN option for 16 players

Geoff Crammond's *Grand Prix 2* is the standard by which all other PC racing titles are judged. An incredible design achievement, it is still the pre-eminent Formula One game, despite the fact it was released in 1996. A sequel was inevitable. And yet a gamble. Surely any game trying to live up to such a legacy is bound to be an anticlimax? It is a mark of Geoff Crammond's coding standards that *F1 Grand Prix 3* allayed the fears and fuelled the hopes of the playtesting mob that laid siege to the Alpha versions on display at ECTS.

Market shifts since 1996 have now made official endorsement *de rigueur* for racing simulations. Consequently, superpublisher Hasbro has negotiated a licence with FIA, Formula One's governing body, to make F1 games for the next five years. That means an F1 in the title but still only gains Hasbro access to 1998's data, teams, drivers, racing liveries, courses and rules. A slight cause for dissatisfaction, possibly, but doubtless 1999 data patches will mysteriously appear on the Internet shortly after release.

Such details mattered little, however, during **Edge**'s fast lap around the Monaco track. Though the test version provided software support only, the engine achieved a smooth frame rate and, in terms of detail, was a graphical match for any accelerated F1 game currently available. More importantly, the racing model was impressive, smoothly conveying notions of speed and force as the car negotiated the renowned street circuit. Finer assessment of the handling was prevented by the presence of the driver assists, pioneered by Crammond, but the comprehensive range of setup options available are a reliable indicator of *GP3*'s depth.

Crammond has yet to make a public announcement, but Hasbro is promising telemetry data covering speed, steering, RPM, throttle, brakes, gear use, and a wheel-by-wheel guide to ride height, suspension travel and lateral and longitudinal acceleration. Naturally players will further be able to adjust the wings, brake balance, gear ratios, springs, ride height, dampers and anti-roll bars. Eight driving aids should help soften realism's blow, however (including self-correcting spin, visible racing line, suggested gear selection and indestructible car), and if the thought of competing in an entire championship with weather effects, qualifying and practice is too much, then take refuge in the quick start/race mode.

F1 Grand Prix 3 is a serious proposition that has negotiated its first public appearance with aplomb. **Edge** will be following its progress closely in the coming months.





Even in software mode, Crammond's latest *GP* title is certainly a match for most graphically accelerated racing sims on the market

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Hasbro/Microprose**

Developer: **Geoff Crammond**

Release: **March**

Origin: **UK**

SWAT 3

With realistic elite forces-based strategic shooters all the rage at the moment, *SWAT 3* is joining the party at the right time. And, on current form, it looks capable of making some serious noise









You team members await your every command and will only move in if told to do so. Realism plays an important part – note the bullet holes (top right)



As a part of an elite unit, you're expected to neutralise threats such as terrorists efficiently and with minimal losses. A headshot should do it





Selecting your men and their weapons for a mission is an integral part of the proceedings (top). While each of the missions occurs in a different location, your objectives are similar

Whereas the previous two *SWAT* games were endorsed by one of LA's SWAT officers, this third instalment receives no such support. Nevertheless, the developer has maintained a good relationship with the city's SWAT team and was therefore able to consult some of its members for technical and tactical advice when it came to put *SWAT 3* together.

The fact that the game's realism is strongly evident, then, should hardly come as a surprise. Attack and defensive formations mirror real SWAT tactics; a choice of authentic weaponry is available (among others, a selection of silenced submachine guns, handguns, shotguns and anti-terrorist devices such as flash grenades); you can shoot through doors and walls (depending on the weapon and projectile type); and a bullet's entry point is smaller than its exiting spot, for example.

As leader, you control two teams of two officers. It's your job to instruct them through a mission, hopefully emerging successful and unscathed. It's all down to strategy, of course.



A strategic and controlled approach is required in order to keep your men alive

The missions are the usual terrorist activity/hostage situation type, though the locations ranging from city halls to nightclubs are at least intriguingly diverse. Yet there's little use in charging in like Schwarzenegger – you and your men are unlikely to last longer than five minutes.

One of the game's nicer additions is the way one of your officer's point of view is displayed on your screen as a picture-in-picture window. Not only does this allow you to check on your team's progression, but the more unscrupulous among you can send obedient team members around a corner and get a good look at potential sniping terrorists without risking your own life.

The version **Edge** has played still had some tweaking to undergo (the AI routines weren't finalised, although things appeared to be progressing reasonably intelligently), but should everything turn out according to the developer's wishes, *SWAT 3* could become yet another engrossing PC strategy shooter.

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Havas**

Developer: **Sierra**

Release: **December**

Origin: **US**

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

The console RPG is finally being liberated from the confines of the living room, but is Sonic Team's online odyssey ambitious enough to lead the first expedition?





The realtime graphics are undeniably impressive, generating both *Final Fantasy*-style mystical forests plus colourful neon street surroundings



If nothing else, this Dreamcast online RPG can boast one element far superior to that of RPGs on other formats: enemies big enough to bring the house down



Gamers may spot a likeness to the opening of SquareSoft's *FFVII*

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sonic Team**
Release: **TBA**
Origin: **Japan**

The ongoing *Phantasy Star* series has, for many years, been a public institution in Japan and a cult favourite among US players, second only to the prolific output of Square. The Saturn and Mega Drive both played host to several instalments, and now the series has spawned its own next generation in the form of a Dreamcast version.

The most important facet of the title is that it takes console roleplaying online before either Square or Nintendo have had a chance to experiment. The Dreamcast's online capabilities are appealing for twoplayer arcade games such as *Sega Rally 2*, but Japanese RPG fans could well light the blue touchpaper in online console gaming terms; this may well be the boom that Sega needs in order to capture an anticipant American RPG audience, too.

Despite the possibilities, though, the game doesn't yet boast gameplay the size and depth of perennial PC favourite *Ultima Online*, for example. A maximum of four players will be able to partake in a single quest, and this may well be the first of many disappointments and anticlimaxes. After all, at this stage the level of party interaction looks similar to the 1993 SNES action-RPG, *Secret of Mana*.

Sega has released a trailer for the game which sees the years since the series' 1985 inception count down on a blank screen until the calendar reaches the year 2000. It proudly proclaims that 'you're not the only hero' and contains much footage of a number of dragon-mounted enemies and only a split-second glimpse of the rest of the game world. Oddly, the clip concludes with the statement that it is 'coming to the Net', forgoing a mention of Dreamcast. While this is indeed true, **Edge** would hope that Sega isn't neglecting the main game in favour of pushing its limited online merits.

The Dreamcast's keyboard and mouse peripherals would have seemed like the natural devices to utilise for this particular type of project, and yet Sega has eschewed this idea, preferring the less complex demands of a traditional console RPG which, without significant gameplay advances, may well have problems facing the next *Final Fantasy*.





Dragons and other staple genre elements will ensure that the traditional RPG fan will feel at home

SNK VS CAPCOM

Chun Li, Mega Man and a multitude of near Biblical proportions take on the Neo Geo coin-op kings in Sega's latest foray into the esoteric and murky realm of the 2D beat 'em up



A familiar Guile, circa 1992, takes on a *Fatal Fury* combatant in a typically clichéd venue for a street scuffle. Dedicated 2D fans will be enthralled





Neither firm has missed the opportunity to promote each others' titles – especially on the Dreamcast. Note the *Powerstone* logo



More up to date beat 'em up commands such as dash are present, but there is no denying that some of the backgrounds featured look sparse

Capcom have always enjoyed an enviable position in the beat 'em up market; the *Street Fighter* series has garnered more attention than any other beat 'em up and has the status of being the 'original'. In these times of *Tekken*, *Soul Calibur* and *Virtua Fighter III*, Capcom has chosen to constantly refine the highly playable 2D beat 'em up, and now has a partner with the same aims.

In typically bizarre fashion, Capcom characters such as Leon from *Resident Evil 2* and Mega Man can be pitted against the cast of *Samurai Showdown*, *The Art of Fighting* and the ever popular *Fatal Fury*. Stylistically the game looks like following *Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter*, and is a tailor-made for a machine burdened with owners needing another beat 'em up fix after *Virtua Fighter III* and *Soul Calibur*. The heritage of both companies shines through, with adverts for titles such as *Powerstone* lurking in the background. Combos look as spectacular as ever, rivalling *Street Fighter III* for pixel pyrotechnics, but it's unclear just how the Dreamcast's controller will fare under the bashing it's likely to get from most gamers struggling with four basic buttons instead of the vital six. Support for Sega's VF3 arcade stick is predictably included, and the game will also be released on the Neo Geo Pocket Colour, with a link facility hopefully available too.

Whatever the case, the Dreamcast will be able to boast the most gorgeous console 2D beat 'em up. However, while Japanese success is virtually certified, a Western reception may be cooler after what has become something of a Dreamcast killer app in *Soul Calibur*.



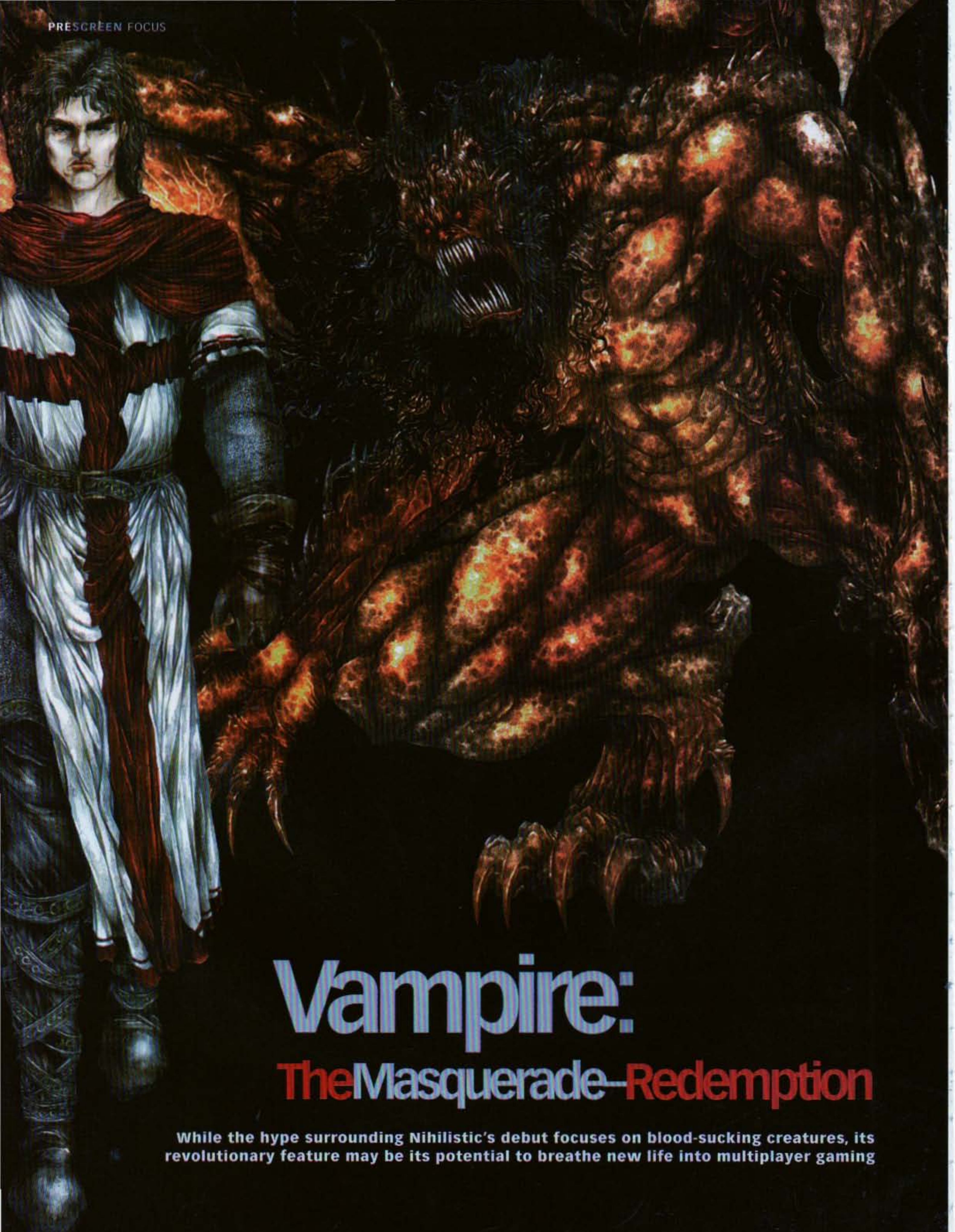
Ryu can spar against the complete cast of *Samurai Showdown*, no matter how cute





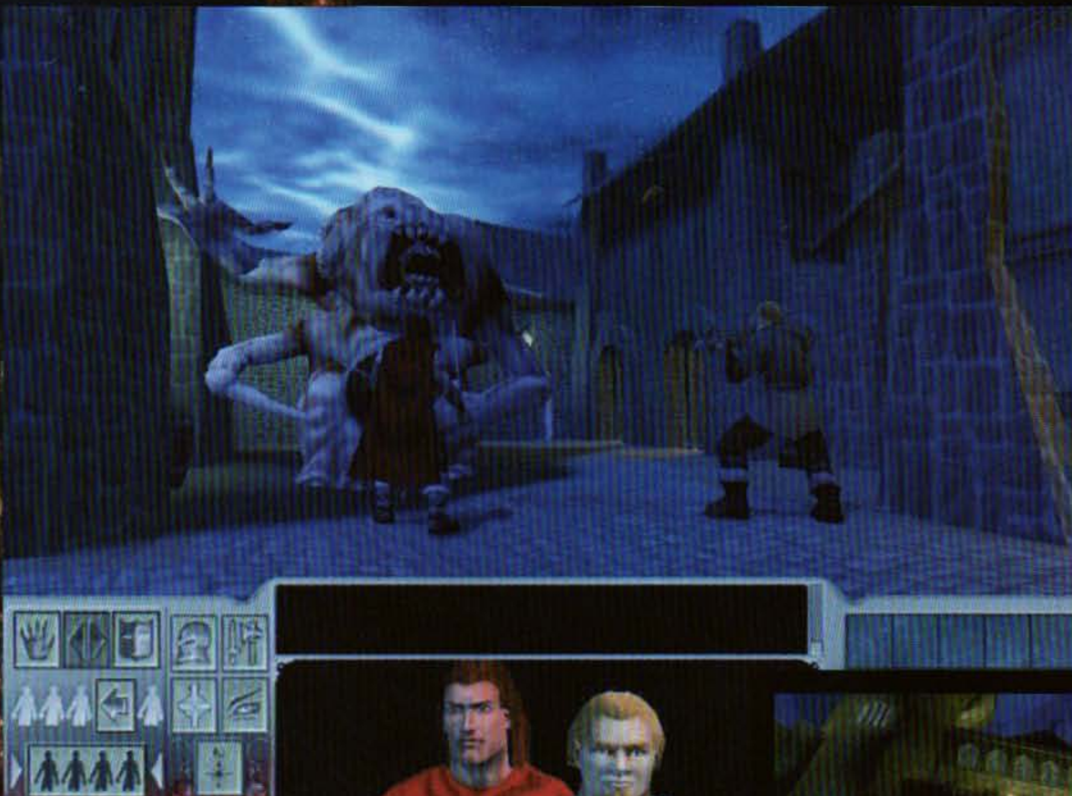
The range of kicks and punches seem unnervingly dated for the *Street Fighter* cast, lending an aged and anachronistic feel to the proceedings

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom/SNK**
Release: **October**
Origin: **Japan**



Vampire: The Masquerade–Redemption

While the hype surrounding Nihilistic's debut focuses on blood-sucking creatures, its revolutionary feature may be its potential to breathe new life into multiplayer gaming







***Vampire* is set in two time periods, with two locations in each. Shown above is the Dark Age period, set in Prague. Modern levels are set in London and New York**



Using its Nod engine, Nihilistic can model *Vampire's* characters with several thousand polygons. The buildings look equal stunning

If one word dominates the hardcore multiplayer community, it's *Quake*. More a verb than a noun, the reason thousands of gamers praise Carmack for their nightly dose of gibs has as much to do with the series' underlying technology than the specific titles that bear id's trademark. On a commercial level, the likes of *Half-Life* and *Kingpin* rely on *Quake II's* engine for their tech, but real fraggers worship it because of the ease with which its code can be modified for their own personal use. Forget *Ultima Online* – the most active online community consists of home hackers building levels and games based on *Quake* and pasting them up for download. And skills honed on *Quake II* are currently being switched over to *Half-Life*. Over 150 mods are in development, ranging from straight firstperson shooters to extreme sports and even racing games.

The power of the mod community to increase the longevity of a title is something no developer attempting a multiplayer option can ignore. Which is why when Nihilistic Software considered the multiplayer strategy for its debut title, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Redemption*, it licensed the *Quake* level editor *QERadiant* rather than the game engine from Dallas' finest. "With this editor you get instantaneous feedback," explains **Steve Tietze**, lead level designer on *Vampire*, and a veteran of numerous *Quake* mission pack levels. "You can manipulate objects in real time and all you need is a PII 333 and a video card with good OpenGL capabilities." Nihilistic is releasing its tweaked version of *QERadiant* and all the game's textures and models with *Vampire*.

And this thoughtful strategy is one of the reasons **Edge** flew into Nihilistic's San Rafael office only two months after first looking at *Vampire* (**E**76). For, while the singleplayer mode has many strong points – a great proprietary engine, an expansive plot based on the White Wolf pen-and-paper licence, and a frisson of vampiric moral ambiguity – its multiplayer option is the first of a new breed of games with the potential to change the social dynamics of online gaming.

In part, this innovation comes directly from the licence on which Nihilistic's game is based. All live roleplaying games are controlled by a godlike gamesmaster or storyteller, and so each session is only as good at the storyteller makes it. Each game is also unique, with storytellers able to use their imaginations to introduce new objects, enemies and situations as circumstances dictate. It's a far cry from the 'first to 20 frags' scenario of most online games. The multiplayer version of *Vampire* is constructed in a similar way to its pen-and-paper cousin, with each online session being controlled by a storyteller

The multiplayer version of *Vampire* is constructed in a similar way to its pen-and-paper cousin, with each online session being controlled by a storyteller

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Activision**

Developer: **Nihilistic**

Release: **Spring**

Origin: **US**



Despite involving vampires, rocket launchers and guns still feature in the game





A storyteller could introduce a Golem (right) into the action in real time











Of the lead Nihilists, only two prove to have real vampiric tendencies: (from top) project leader Ray Gresko, lead artist Maarten Kraaijvanger, lead level designer Steve Tietze and director of technology Rob Huebner

whose PC also acts as the server.

"It was a logical step that was going to happen sooner or later because it's similar to the way multiplayer client-server games are already programmed," explains **Rob Huebner**. And Nihilistic's director of technology should know, as his previous experience has included coding the network aspects of *Descent* and *Dark Force II: Jedi Knight*. He continues. "Even when you're playing *Quake*, technically the server has unlimited power over how the world works. If the server decides all the characters are going to jump, it could easily do it, but there's no interface to let the player control it. So in a sense all we're doing in *Vampire* is adding an interface for the storyteller."

Gaining total control

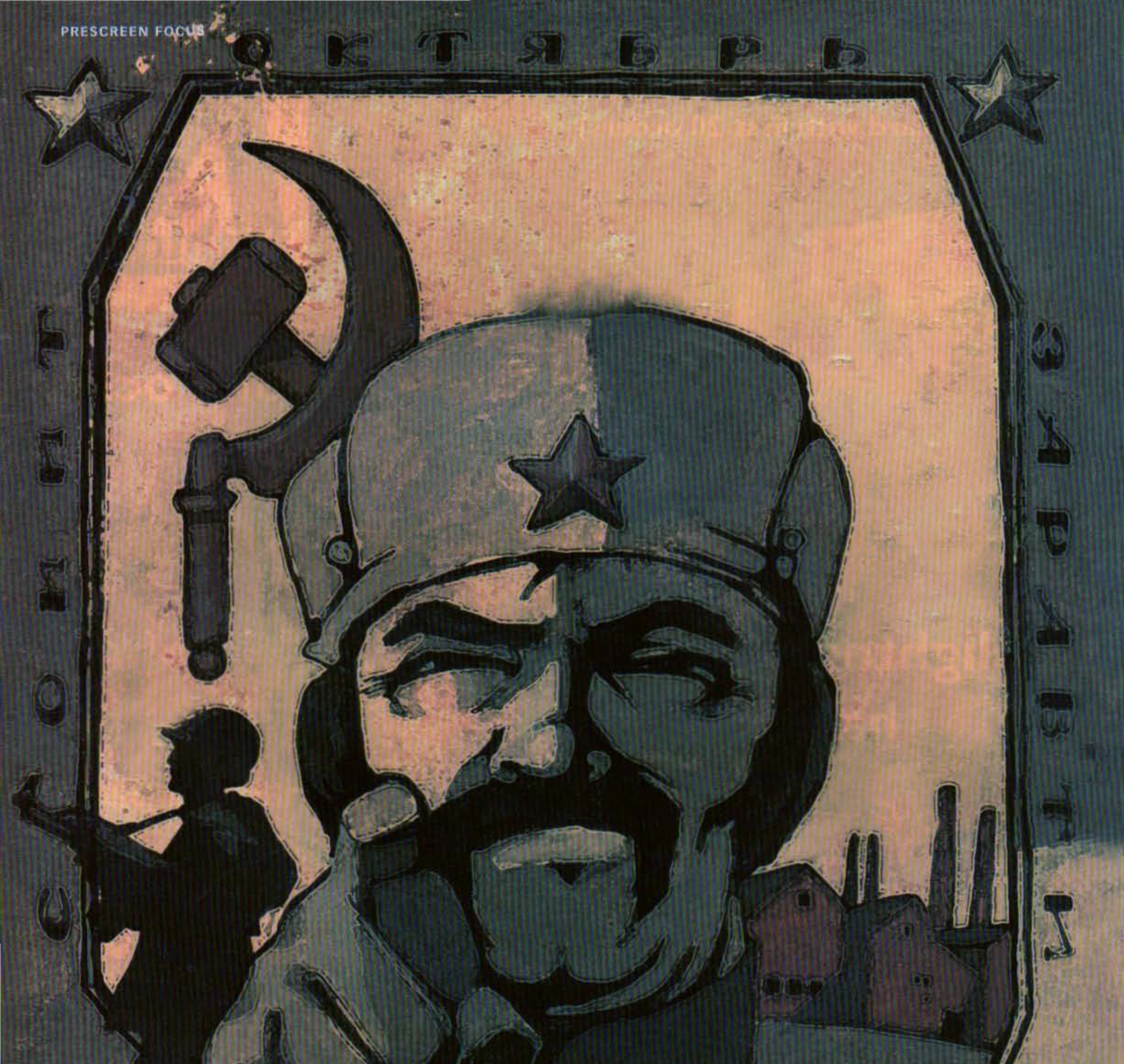
Potentially, storytellers have complete power over a game. This will be scaleable, however, so players can see what the level of control is for any game they wish to enter. Storytellers have the ability to introduce enemies and objects in real time, using a simple drag-and-drop menu. Other options include possessing characters, removing objects from inventories, as well as handing out experience points at the end of a battle. Alternatively they can even secretly play as characters themselves. They can obviously 'talk' to characters as well, and Nihilistic is currently looking into the possibility of including support for voice communication, too. The key advantage this gives *Vampire* is that each session will be tightly scripted to the level of characters actually playing, creating a more engrossing experience, although this depends on the quality of the storytellers. Initially, gamers who have beta tested *Vampire* will fulfil this role to maintain quality control. Thanks to its recent deal with Activision, WON.net will be the community's hub. Players will be able to upload their characters to the site, and it will also act as a central point for the download of patches and upgrades.

In the long term, though, Huebner argues the self-modulation is the only way that the game will develop, with good storytellers who control cheating gaining popularity, while cheats will be shunned or find other cheats to play with. (WON.net will feature basic code to check characters haven't cheated, suddenly gaining thousands of experience points, however.) "The main thing is to make the experience enjoyable for the player," says Huebner. "A good storyteller will forbid cheating, or if it happens, they will kick the player out."

But while plenty of gamers enjoy hacking around, designing new *Quake* levels, it's less clear that an untapped pool of gamers exists who would prefer to tell stories, rather than play them, although Huebner disagrees. "If you go into a MUD, you'll see lots of people who are very good at telling stories and organising campaigns," he cautions. "Even on a games like *EverQuest*, there are probably people running around that really want to be gamesmasters. So once you give these people an outlet, they'll come out of the woodwork. I know that if I picked up a game like *Vampire* in the store, I would immediately jump into learning the storyteller's interface, because to me it's more rewarding." E



With the release of the *QERadiant* level tools and the multiplayer options, *Vampire* communities will be able to build their own levels and storylines



REPUBLIC

Format: **PC** | Publisher: **Eidos** | Developer: **Elixir Studios** | Release: **Jan '01** | Origin: **UK**

THE ONE THING EVERYBODY KNEW ABOUT ELIXIR'S FIRST GAME WAS THAT IT WOULD INVOLVE SIMULATION AND STRATEGY. WHAT NO ONE COULD HAVE GUESSED AT WAS ITS SCALE. *REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION* SIMULATES AN ENTIRE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRY WITH ONE MILLION CITIZENS IN REALTIME 3D. IN THIS WORLD EXCLUSIVE, EDGE BRINGS YOU THE FIRST LOOK AT ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS COMPUTER GAMES EVER CONCEIVED





Photography: Jude Edginton

The background history and visual look of *Republic: The Revolution* is based on months spent in the Russian department of the British Library

Demis Hassabis is starting to get excited. He's spent 12 long months not talking about the game for which he left Lionhead and Peter Molyneux to set up his own studio. It's been tough keeping mum, though, and towards the end his defences started to weaken. Details slipped out. And thanks to one of Eidos' over enthusiastic PR managers, even the project's name was revealed. But now the self-imposed silence is over, Hassabis just can't stop talking: talking about the revolutionary technology underpinning the game and why he thinks it is one of the most innovative and ambitious projects in development. No wonder in the brief moments when he stops talking a huge grin spreads across his face.

Meanwhile **Edge** is transfixed, looking at a computer screen on which a technology demo of *Republic*'s graphics engine is showing row upon row of incredibly detailed buildings, which stretch out to the horizon. "It's a pure 'take the piss' demo," laughs Hassabis. "We've got 10,000 of those buildings lined up and that's billions of polys onscreen, because each building is ten million polys. But just to prove we aren't cheating, we can zoom in on any one," he adds, before closing on a randomly chosen balcony. Each of the railings is built with polygons, even down to the individual scrolls and curves of the wrought-iron work.

This isn't a special case, though. "Anyone can just plant something in a world and say, 'Here's this thing we can zoom up to', but we can zoom in anywhere," he says. "I call it fabric and fibre. We have this hugely detailed fabric but you can take a microscope to any part and see the fibres. To give you an example of how hard this was, *Sim City 3000* looks exactly like *Sim City 2000* but it took three-and-a-half years to make. The reason was, for two years Maxis was trying to make an engine that could show a city in full 3D. They basically gave up and said it was technically impossible. We managed to do it in four months".

The power of the engine has already caused some novel problems. In any ordinary game, the level of detail the artists work to is limited by the engine. In the case of *Republic*, the art team is having to hold meetings to make sure everyone is detailing their buildings consistently. "There are raging storms because whatever they decide, everyone has got to subscribe to that," Hassabis admits. Recent discussions included whether screw threads on the bolts of factory buildings' plant machinery or pollen on the flowers lining the balconies of the worker's high-rises should be modelled. The answers, respectively, were yes and no.

"The mad thing is, we are having to buy Silicon Graphic workstations because our models are such high detail, *3D Studio Max* can't cope with them," Hassabis says. "And we haven't even started on the fractal-generated cracks in the pavement yet."

Good foundations

It's a sobering thought that it will be 16 months or so until *Republic* hits the streets, so what **Edge** is witnessing remains a work-in-progress demo. And while the game isn't



Drinking in Elixir (from left to right): CEO Demis Hassabis, designer Joe McDonagh, director David Silver and art manager Colin Seaman





yet playable, the core engine behind it is highly impressive. Elixir expects to get enough components ready to make *Republic* playable by January, but until then it is concentrating on maxing out the technology base.

"Imagine a rally in Red Square with the camera panning around in full 3D, zooming up to the speaker and then back to the crowd," challenges Hassabis. "That's why we need an engine of this power. These scenes will be like ingame cut-scenes but beyond just watching them, there will be AI tweaks. For example, if someone is giving a speech, there will be icons in the bottom right, where you can say speak louder, make a joke, be more emotional. And depending on the stats of your speaker, you'll see this happening. If you don't want to watch you can just get on with the game, but then you don't get those extra options."

Another aspect currently being put through its paces is the AI, which will control the million people that populate the country. A 2D testbed is being used to demo advanced path-finding techniques so the citizens can intelligently move through the city, avoiding traffic and other pedestrians, using the Metro, posting letters and naturally finding their way to their destinations. One interesting scenario displayed was the intervention of the police force in a riot. Although the forces were only represented by coloured triangles, the results were startlingly naturalistic. As the rioters fanned out, trying to escape, smallscale encounters developed. Some rioters escaping scot-free while one unlucky character ended up with six policemen on his tail.

"We want a million people but I'm not talking about automatons," Hassabis says. "We are going to have a million individual living, breathing people with their own daily routines and their own beliefs and loyalties. If you leave the game alone, they will happily go to work, get promoted, collect their kids from school and go to the pub."

This is one of the underlying rationales of the game. Following his experience with the 3.5million-selling *Theme Park*, Hassabis has thought hard about how to make *Republic* as accessible as possible. "I really think that non-games players will be interested to watch the world go by," he says. As he stresses, this is the reason the game's technology base needs to be so good, especially visually. The technology has implications for the game design, too. For example, in previous sim games, if the player ordered a self-laudatory article to be written in a paper he controlled, the whole population would gain respect points in response. In *Republic*, however, each paper will have a physical circulation, so only the people who 'receive' the paper will become more loyal.

"It makes our lives as designers easier because things will just emerge naturally. So we don't have to worry what the effect of a

"WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A MILLION INDIVIDUAL LIVING, BREATHING PEOPLE WITH THEIR OWN DAILY ROUTINES AND THEIR OWN BELIEFS AND LOYALTIES"



Such is the power of *Republic's* graphics engine that artists are not actually able to view their models in *3D Studio Max*



AI testbed

Although currently only represented in this 2D form, Hassabis believes Elixir is pushing the boundaries of AI by having a million individuals in the game. "We'll be compressing people down when you're not looking at them," he says. "And when we expand them up again they'll still be consistent, 'cos you still can't physically store a million people on a normal PC."

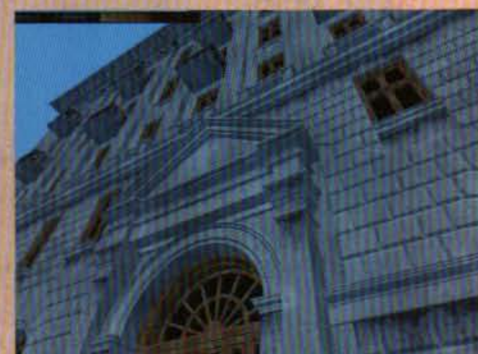








The stage 2 technology demo of *Republic's* graphics engine is already turning out of incredible results. Effects such as bump mapping and lighting still have to be added



propaganda piece will really be, because once we know the circulation of the paper, it will just happen: your loyalty base will just go up."

Back to the board

Proud as he is of Elixir's technology, however, Hassabis is clear that it's not the reason he wanted to make *Republic*, merely the reason he can. "We're not really a tech company, we just happen to have great technology," he explains. "We're not id and we are never going to want to be. First and foremost we want to make original, ambitious and innovative games."

The inspiration for *Republic* came from a little-known board game called Junta. Based in a banana republic, the goal was to make as much money as possible by becoming the president. Essentially, it was a game about the pursuit of power. "Junta is totally different to *Republic* but it got me thinking," Hassabis recalls. "I've always been into current affairs and I love films about power struggles and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to do this game'." Five years later, the technology is in place to bring that dream to fruition.

The republic in question is the fictional country of Novistrana, meaning 'new country' in Russian. The 2,000-square-kilometre playing area is based on three real ex-Soviet states – Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan – and notionally located somewhere between the Caspian Sea and the southern borders with Iran. The population is thus divided along ethnic and religious lines. Starting out in a randomly selected small town, players have to build up their base until they gain control of a local city. From there they start to consolidate influence until they move to the capital to take on the president. Hassabis estimates it will take around ten hours to get enough power to make that jump. However, there are many obstacles in the way, not least of which being the 16 other factions also out to take over the country. Of course, the president will be attempting to hang on to power himself, too. Controlled either by other players or AI opponents (although the president is always AI-controlled), these factions will exert their influence over the 50 cities scattered throughout Novistrana. One of Elixir's obvious priorities is to complete a city editor that will automatically crunch out standard city designs. The capital, which is based on St. Petersburg plus some extra creative touches, will be constructed entirely by hand.

THE REPUBLIC IN QUESTION IS THE FICTIONAL COUNTRY OF NOVISTRANA, MEANING 'NEW COUNTRY' IN RUSSIAN. IT HAS A 2,000-SQUARE-KILOMETRE PLAYING AREA

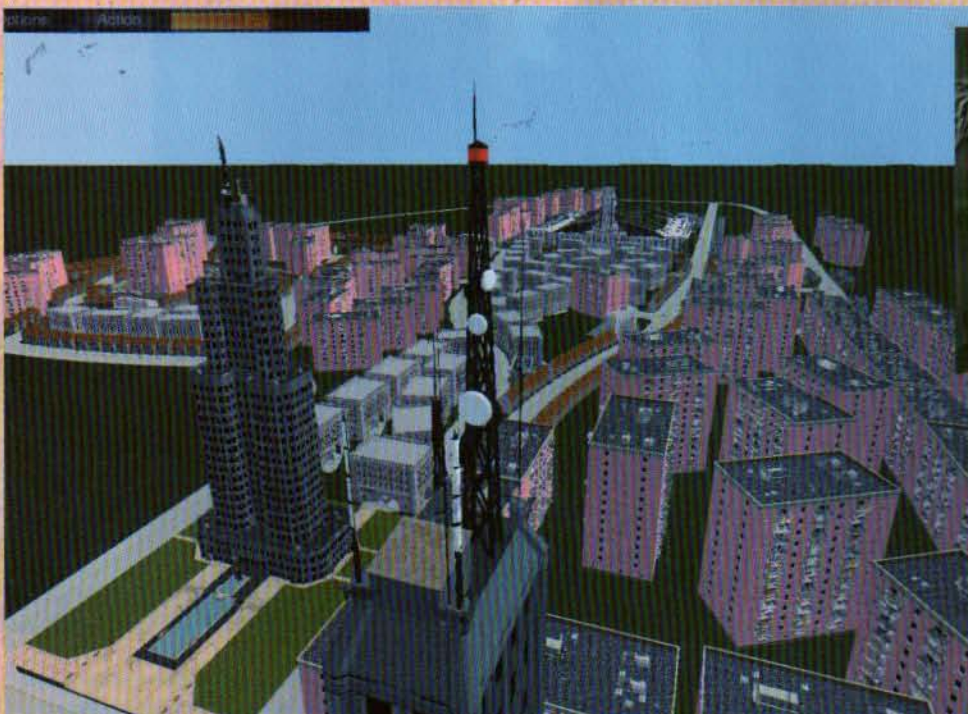




With a fully controllable camera that can zoom in anywhere, it's no wonder Republic's artists have been arguing whether to model pollen particles on the petals of flowers

Play made easy

Aware of the need to keep the game controls as straightforward as possible, everything that occurs in *Republic* is organised using one mechanism and one resource. The mechanism





The country of Novistrana contains one capital and 50 cities. Each will consist of thousands of buildings and people



is character-controlled actions, while the resource is influence.

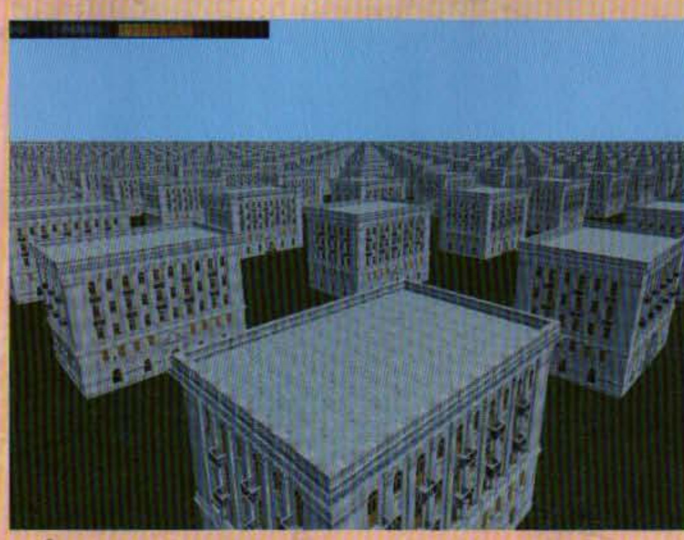
"As a faction leader, you don't actually do things yourself, it's not a RTS," explains Hassabis. "But at the start of the game you have one, what we call, key character, your Peter Mandelson figure. He's your right hand man." Beyond that you have to recruit new characters that will allow you to order additional actions. For example, control of a newspaper editor would give you the ability to discredit your enemies by publishing nefarious gossip. Equally, advanced actions can be built by combining characters. With a union leader and a rabble rouser under your command, the ability to organise a rally becomes available. Towards the end of the game, enormous set-pieces action will become available, as you could have control of ten or more key characters and hundreds of actions.

The advantage of this approach is that highly complex actions can be intuitively built from simple building blocks. Players have the freedom to play in any way they wish, from trying to take over the army to starting a Ghandi-style people-power movement. Hassabis believes this approach will greatly reduce the complexity of the game. "Everyone knows how to do these things because we are mirroring real life," he says. "We are in the real world and you set off events that everyone has read about and is familiar with. We all know how politicians gets disgraced."

Republic has been designed with five specific playing styles in mind: political, religious, military, criminal and business, with each path possessing inherent advantages. Playing religiously, your key characters will be very loyal obeying all your commands, whereas criminally based groups will be less loyal but possess more money with which to buy influence. However, there won't be any choice of playing style *per se*, it will all be implicit in the game design.

"How you play will reinforce what sort of leader you are and what sort of people are attracted to your faction," reveals Hassabis. "I don't see you just concentrating on one strand. You might be very strong in one, quite strong in the secondary one and weak in the third one and then the fourth and fifth ones are where you have to do pacts and deals with other factions to cover your weaknesses." The basic mechanism of these strands was tested using a card game based around the key characters and their actions.

But, as Hassabis admits, balancing the *Republic* will take most of next year. "As with any kind of open-ended game, the only way to tweak it is to play it for thousands of hours. There's no secret to getting good gameplay,





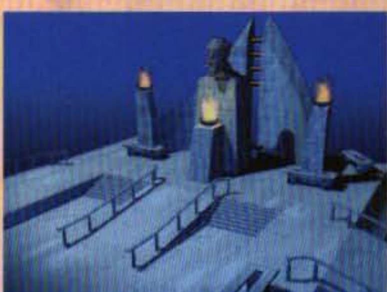
(Left) There are 10,000 buildings in this demo and each building consists of around ten million polys, resulting in over a billion polys onscreen. At present it runs at 20 fps. Elixir is designing the game for a minimum spec of a PII running at 266MHz, with a 3D card and 64Mb of RAM



As well as monumental buildings, *Republic* will feature realistic trees consisting of over 10,000 polys. Each leaf will be individually modelled









you've just got to play it. That's going to be a huge task but it's unavoidable."

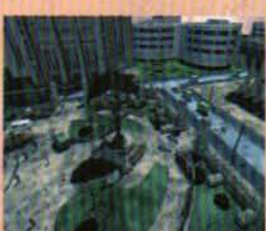
Games for all

Republic still has a long way to go until such balancing is an issue, though, and this early demonstration of the concept is merely a taster. As much as anything, the point of revealing the game at this stage is to finally be able to start talking about it officially. Not that the media blackout has stopped Hassabis talking to non-gamers about the concept.

"We had the re-insurer coming in to check us out," he recalls. "He was this 55-year-old man and I thought he had used grey spraypaint he was so grey. I took him through the game. Obviously he'd never dreamed of playing a computer game but he was genuinely interested in what was going on. I think a lot of it is because this is set in the real world. If he'd asked, 'What game are you working on?' and I'd said, 'I'm doing wizards killing orcs', he'd immediately have shut up."

So many developers are talking about reaching the mass market, yet few seem to be capable of approaching that segment in a logical way. And however *Republic* ends up playing, at least Elixir has approached its first game bearing this in mind. Combining cutting-edge technology and accessible gameplay, it expects to sell millions of copies. Hassabis ends by re-stressing the fundamental reason he believes *Republic* has the potential to reach the unconverted: "I think finding out what is it like to become president is one of the most exciting things you can do that most people never get to do. It's as escapist as anything any fantasy game, but it's set in an environment everyone knows about. If we can attract a whole load of new people and challenge their idea of what a game is about, then we've done something truly amazing." **E**

"AS WITH ANY KIND OF OPEN-ENDED GAME, THE ONLY WAY TO TWEAK IT IS TO PLAY IT FOR THOUSANDS OF HOURS. THERE'S NO SECRET TO GOOD GAMEPLAY"





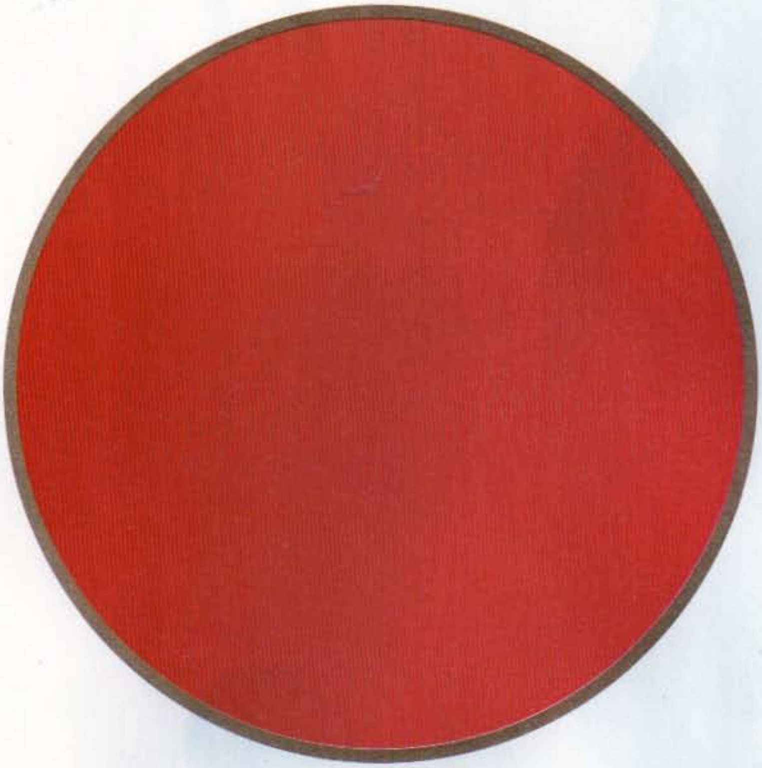
Stills from the opening FMV show the kind of ingame look Elixir hopes to create with *Republic: The Revolution*





A million individual people will populate the game

Tokyo



game





show



'99

Having once more debagged to Japan's capital for a taste of the most lively videogames spectacle on earth, Edge braves canned coffee, game characters made real, and Lionel Ritchie to deliver this report

Few things in life must rate as surreal an experience as listening to a trombone-led Muzak interpretation of Lionel Richie's 'Hello' at eight o'clock in the morning against the moving background of endless concrete edifices that constitutes Tokyo's suburbs. Yet this is the situation **Edge** finds itself in, having jumped on board a courtesy bus service transporting eager western journalists from the Japanese capital's frenzied centre to the comparatively calmer precinct surrounding the Makuhari Messe Convention Centre, home of the Tokyo Game Show exhibition. And after ten Muzak-filled minutes, the Makuhari district can't come soon enough.

Some 1,800 seconds later, during which the violin rendition of 'Hey Jude' stood out as an undiscovered potential musical triumph, **Edge** is registering for the show. Today, Friday September 17, is press day and Namco has kindly agreed to start the proceedings a little early by allowing the group of western journos **Edge** is with to look around its stand. Press pass dangling around the neck and door staff swiftly negotiated, **Edge** duly follows the Namco representative until she is on home ground. The stand itself is divided into four distinct areas dedicated to three PlayStation games and a giant monitor screen showing the publisher's PlayStation2 developments. First up (and because the PS2 display remains unplugged at this stage) is *Dragon Valor*. The first *DV*-related material **Edge** witnessed was shown during a Namco HQ visit some 20 months ago. A mixture of FMV, stop-motion animation and digitised sequences, the footage left serious doubts as to the possible quality of the finished product. Namco, it transpires, knew what it was doing, and while the playable TGS version of *Dragon Valor* is by no means finished, it's nevertheless looking very impressive, boasting some beautiful graphics and cute character design with a healthy dose of all-important gameplay.

The lure of PlayStation2

Having spent some time on the likeable 3D platformer *Pac-Man World 20th Anniversary*, **Edge** has only just started playing *Rescue Shot Booby Bo* (an intriguing if slightly limited G-Con compatible title) when someone fires up the PS2 video wall. The wait for *Tekken Tag Tournament* is seemingly interminable as the expectant crowd is treated to the opening FMV sequences from the



Tetsuya Mizuguchi stands a safe distance from Sega's Spice Tubbies dance act and later has a dabble with *Space Channel 5* for comparison purposes

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

Space Channel 5's Tetsyua Mizuguchi shows his team's rhythm-action creation from Sega's expansive main stage, retiring to higher ground for safety reasons

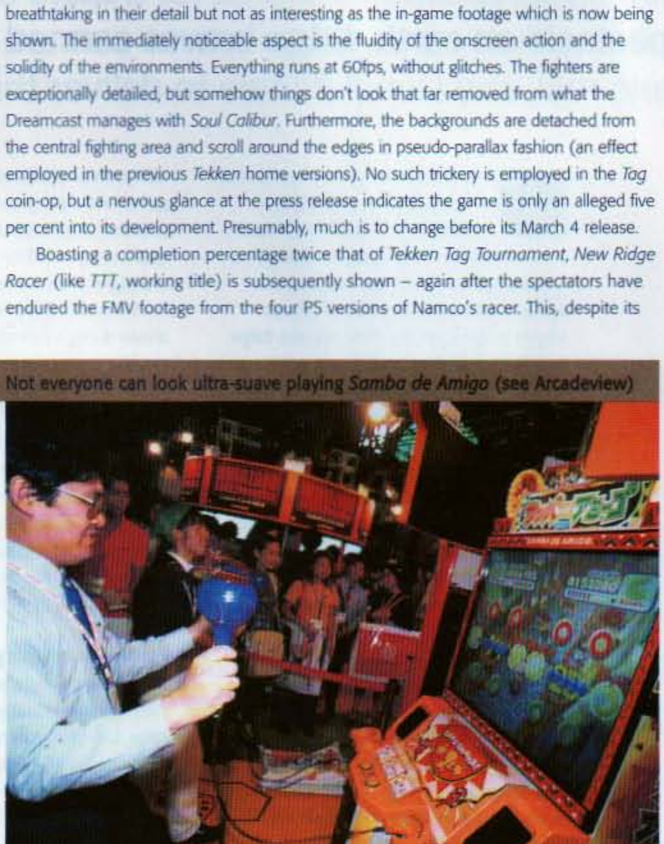
title's three PS-based predecessors. Finally, it arrives. The brief snippets of FMV shown are breathtaking in their detail but not as interesting as the in-game footage which is now being shown. The immediately noticeable aspect is the fluidity of the onscreen action and the solidity of the environments. Everything runs at 60fps, without glitches. The fighters are exceptionally detailed, but somehow things don't look that far removed from what the Dreamcast manages with *Soul Calibur*. Furthermore, the backgrounds are detached from the central fighting area and scroll around the edges in pseudo-parallax fashion (an effect employed in the previous *Tekken* home versions). No such trickery is employed in the *Tag* coin-op, but a nervous glance at the press release indicates the game is only an alleged five per cent into its development. Presumably, much is to change before its March 4 release.

Boasting a completion percentage twice that of *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *New Ridge Racer* (like *TTT*, working title) is subsequently shown – again after the spectators have endured the FMV footage from the four PS versions of Namco's racer. This, despite its obviously early status, is more promising. The cars are excellently recreated, complete with assorted liveries and soon-to-be-obligatory brake callipers visible through the spinning alloys. A close-up of a wheel reveals a fully working (and mostly realistic) suspension system, though, oddly, the cars fail to react authentically to the road, resulting in the dreaded floating effect. However, other effects such as sparks, tyre smoke and environmental mapping are wonderfully realised. **Edge** notes that while the roadside buildings are a little plain (and sure to be embellished before release), the developer is keen to show off the PS2's potential. The various camera angles used for the replay footage often display entire road sections that aren't even raced on by the in-game vehicles – they're just there for scenery.

As the screen spins into loop mode, the thought of having to stand through another three sets of *Tekken* FMV before getting to the interesting bit proves too much for most, who trundle off to the Sony stand where *TTT* is available in playable form anyway.

Roommania #203 and _Typing of the Dead_ may be nonsensical, but at the very least they show a willingness for experimentation

Not everyone can look ultra-suave playing *Samba de Amigo* (see Arcadeview)



Escaping to Sega

And if nothing else, past TGS experience has taught that the only day you're ever likely to get close enough to the

Shenmue (left) continues to impress like few games can – even in video-only form – while Mizuguchi-san's *Space Channel 5* (right) is refreshingly wacky





Roommania #203 (left) has you controlling a virtual person's environment with interesting consequences. *Jet Set Radio* (right) is most intriguing (see Alphas)







D2's 'Laura' gets paid to sit on a snowscooter and smile all day, while a few metres away Sega's little helpers actually have to work for their yen (right)

games and play them for any substantial amount of time is press day. Once the public is allowed in (Saturday and Sunday) you just get swallowed in its wake.

So **Edge** heads off into Dreamcast land. There, *Shenmue* is understandably afforded a significant amount of space but, disappointingly, fails to make a playable appearance. The rolling video shows the new forklift truck-related action **Edge** had seen the previous day at a last-minute-announced Sega conference, as well as more undeniably impressive sequences from Yu Suzuki's ambitious epic, while a monologue describes the significance of the game's 'magic weather' system (little more than seasonal changes occurring in real time).

Space Channel 5, on the other hand, may not offer climatic alterations (magical or otherwise), but Tetsuya Mizuguchi's title certainly occupies a central role in Sega's stand. It's a thoroughly interesting product (see last issue), and a good indication of Sega's intention of focusing on playability through audaciously different products – indeed, while thirdparty-developed software adorns the stand (Video System's *F1 World Grand Prix*, reviewed p77, and the dubious *D2* grabbing the most attention), it's Sega's own stuff that impresses most. The splendid *Virtual On*







Yuji Naka demos the mad, mad, mad yet lovable world of *Chu Chu Rocket* (main) – one of the most frantic (and fun) games you're likely to play on Dreamcast. Not that *Virtual On* (top right) or *Crazy Taxi* are dull, dull, dull, of course

Oratorio Tangram and *Crazy Taxi* (see p28) may be arcade conversions, but powerfully good fun they are nonetheless. *Roommania #203*, an exercise in human behaviour simulation, and *Typing of the Dead* may be nonsensical, but at the very least they show a willingness for experimentation (as well as demonstrating that despite the use of a QWERTY keyboard, a UK hack cannot type Japanese words as quickly as English ones). And the frantic online battle puzzler *Chu Chu Rocket* (*Smash TV* meets UNO card game with mice on speed) may look like a massive graphical backstep, but it's stupidly addictive and immensely recreational, though sadly overlooked by the majority of western journos. Similarly, *Jet Set Radio* (shown in video form only), with its cartoon-like polygonal characters, looks fascinating. Then, just as **Edge** prepares to venture elsewhere, Sega decides to announce *Phantasy Star Online* (see p36) to a suddenly highly-receptive crowd.



Every year Crash tries his best to get himself accepted by Japanese gamers. This time he even brought a friend along

The two faces of PS2





A lot of the PS2 games shown at TGS were still running on the ¥2,000,000 dev kit (top), but a few, including *GT2000*, were already in solid gold disc state spinning in the actual home unit

A PS2 pudding

It's getting close to midday, and a quick (polystyrene) plate of noodles from one of the various on-site vendors and a can of chilled coffee from a vending machine provides enough energy for an assault on Sony's now less-frenzied PS2 stand. A preliminary walkthrough permitting a strategic drive on the playable software is quickly executed, and *GT2000* seems as appropriate a place to start as any. But no sooner has the helpful Sony girl painstakingly explained the controls (after all, in addition to left/right movement there is the necessity of controlling your car's accelerating and braking abilities) and the game loaded than Kazunori Yamauchi, *GT2000*'s producer, produces a newer version of the game which he swaps over while explaining that he hasn't slept for the last few days. And after a brief chat, he disappears into the crowd to update the other versions available, leaving **Edge** to appreciate his game's play mechanics. The track offered is Seattle's road-based circuit and is clearly still under construction – the road marking textures look a little rough and some of the buildings are at an earlier stage than *New Ridge Racer*'s. However, what must be far nearer completion is the car handling. But three laps just isn't enough. After politely handing the Dual Shock 2 to the smiling attendant (in Japanese videogames exhibitions hogging a play station is considered highly discourteous, although most visiting westerners completely ignore this), the search for another demo pod offering *GT2000* is on. A mere six minutes and two poor displays of racing technique later, **Edge** is back behind the joypad. At first, the car on screen appears to behave very similarly to the PlayStation versions of *Gran Turismo*, but after a while you realise there's more subtlety involved – even more refinement present. (Hardly surprising, as two days later **Edge** learns the extra processing power of the PS2's CPU has allowed developer Polyphony to incorporate calculations for an extra axis of movement into the vehicles' handling.)

However, *Tekken Tag Tournament*, it turns out, plays astoundingly similar to previous *Tekken* outings, regardless of the obvious differences offered by the tag option available. Naturally, even at this early stage it impresses graphically,

In **Japanese** videogames exhibitions **hogging a PlayStation** is considered **highly discourteous**



Allegedly only five-per-cent complete, *Tekken Tag Tournament* currently looks lovely, though not amazing. Let's see what a few months can do

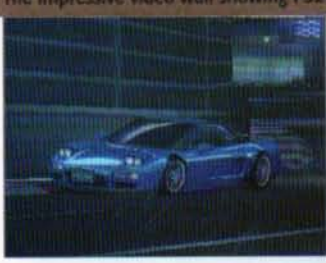
On the current PlayStation, Namco's *Dragon Valor* (left) impresses suitably, but as far as PS2 land is concerned, Square promises the most with *The Bouncer*







The impressive video wall showing PS2 *TTT* and *New RR* at one corner of Namco's stand is a popular stopping point







The *New Ridge Racer* demo (main) looks very promising – at times even more so than *GT2000* (top left) – but Edge came away preferring *GT2*

though there's still some way to go. And after losing miserably to a Japanese journalist, the time has probably come for **Edge** to look at some of the other PS2 offerings. Playable versions of SCEI's appealing *Dark Cloud* and From Software's questionable *Eternal Ring* again highlight the by now recurring realisation that all PS2 titles are being shown possibly too early. While it's easy to spot the potential in a few, most are still too long a way from the end of their development cycle to tell. But of all the software shown, Square's *The Bouncer* currently promises the most.

Promising too, is the PS2's DVD capability. **Edge** admits to having expected Sony to deliberately compromise on the playback quality of DVD video (in the same manner that audiophiles would hardly use a PlayStation to playback their music CDs) in order to cut costs, but at the show, standing in front of a PS2 unit spinning a demo DVD disc in its drive, such worries are utterly crushed. The images displayed show no digital artefacts, while colours are vibrant yet stable, and edges clean and clearly defined. Not bad for a 128bit videogame console.

Remembering the now generation

But let's not forget there's still a 32bit version of the PlayStation available. Sony clearly hasn't, and a substantial proportion of its imposing stand is hence dedicated to its global conqueror. In all honesty, of the games presented only *Crash Team Racing* and *Gran Turismo 2* command significant presence. Yes, *Legend of Dragoon* is here, but only in running FMV form. *GT2*, on the other hand, is worth attention. The playable version volunteered is a very different beast from the ECTS code **Edge** last tried out, with a lot more cars and

Sony's PS2 slideshow













Behind the PS2 area, a small cinema atmosphere is ensured as Sony plays looping videos of its forthcoming 128bit, 300MHz entertainment console to a most receptive crowd. All of the machine's areas are covered, from its obvious gameplaying ability (going so far as to address the issue of backwards compatibility), its DVD video friendliness, its connectivity, and its all-new Dual Shock joypad



More showgoers gather in front of Namco's PlayStation2 monolith, much to the desperation of the TGS marshals whose job it is to keep the aisles obstruction-free

tracks available, and the handling should have most other developers reaching for the Melatonin tablets. For **Edge**, this is the game of the show.

Having exhausted the efforts of the two key players, it's time to check out the rest of the field. This autumn's TGS has seen a number of companies refusing to show, and it certainly feels as though something is missing. Other than the oddly alluring *Muscle Ranking Vol.1*, where players undergo a number of tasks testing their strength and dexterity, Konami shows very little of any consequence – it's surprising what difference a *Metal Gear Solid* or two can make. Similarly, though perhaps less surprisingly, Bandai leaves much to be desired, with only *Countdown Vampires* and karate sim *Ichigeki* generating any real interest.

Things improve once you step into Capcom territory. It's all a bit evil with residents *Biohazard: Gun Survivor*, *Biohazard 2* (on N64), *Biohazard 3 Last Escape*, and *Biohazard – Code: Veronica* taking centre stage. Of the four, the latter is looking the most intriguing, if only because the manner in which the camera follows the player offers some new twists on the familiarly tension-filled gameplay.

Nearby, with the near-finished (and very playable) *Dewprism* as well as *Vagrant Story*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Chrono Cross* and the seemingly improved *Parasite Eve II* (see p29), Square is saved from the sea of mediocrity that has most of the other publishers drowning.

Dragon Valor for the current PlayStation (left) is deservedly popular with the crowd, while Sega continues to campaign its latest console's networking capability (right)



Mitchell appears to have rapidly settled into his new role as spokesman for all things *Pac-Man* related





Less publishers this year means a smaller ratio of game girls to game boys, which ensures that the few who do make it get all the attention (left)





Unlike E3 (and even, to some extent, ECTS), companies at Japanese videogame shows usually refrain from exuberant stands, preferring to emphasis their software

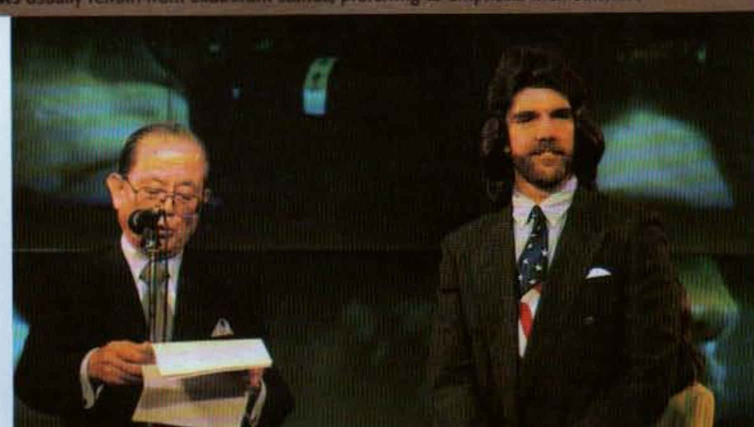
The way out

It is with this depressing thought in mind that **Edge** wanders towards one of the countless exits when *Pac-Man* player extraordinaire Billy Mitchell is spied on the Namco stage being congratulated by CEO Masaya Nakamura on being the first person to ever complete the legendary game of pill gobbling with maximum points. Looking surprisingly confident despite the size of the crowd assembled, Mitchell appears to have rapidly settled into his new role as spokesman for all things *Pac-Man* related. Having heard enough noise for a day, **Edge** leaves them to it only to climb aboard the Muzak-sponsored shuttle service back to the hotel. Downtown Tokyo has rarely seemed so far away…

After escaping a potentially enlightening situation by resisting an offer to frequent Shinjuku's 'LOVE… GOOD… CHEAP… CAPTAIN…' bar after a nanosecond's consideration the previous night, **Edge** is feeling unusually alert this morning. Today being Saturday, TGS will see a stream of Japanese videogamers flow through its many doors. They come in thousands, and usually a hardcore minority deems it necessary to arrive dressed up as a favourite games character and then pose as sad, lonely teenagers take pictures. But it's all harmless fun, really, and a good reminder of the astounding passion for videogaming that sadly refrains from venturing outside this archipelago.



As most of the work has been already done, **Edge** is here to absorb the atmosphere while keeping an eye out for the visitors' reactions to the games on offer. There are no real surprises, however. They queue in their hundreds for the chance to view a minute's worth of new FMV sequence from the latest RPG. They like *Biohazard Code: Veronica*, *Shenmue*, *Virtual On Oratorio Tangram*, *Space Channel 5*, and (showing more affinity for spotting a good game than their western counterparts) *Chu Chu Rocket*. And they like PS2, too, of course. In particular, *GT2000*, *TTT* and *The Bouncer* receive a lot of attention, but the humble PlayStation manages to capture its own noteworthy audience courtesy of *GT2*. Oh, and there is that *Legend of Dragoon* FMV.



Namco chairman and CEO Masaya Nakamura chats to American Billy Mitchell

But by now the time has come to check out another busy, noisy, games-filled, otaku-frequented environment – Akihabara beckons. Let's just hope the bus driver forgets to switch on his 'entertainment' system.

Splendid – he hasn't.

PC 3D: T
GENER

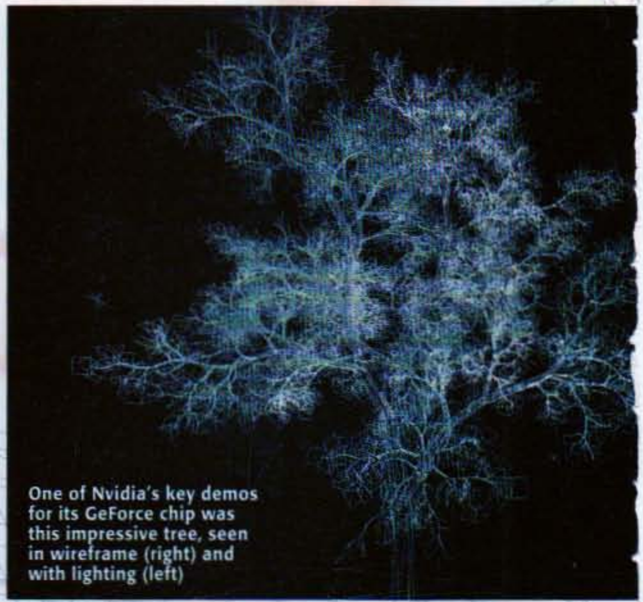
The big news at this year's ECTS was the clash between emerging technologies from 3D graphics chip titans, 3dfx and Nvidia. Edge takes a look at developments in this most fierce of competitions, and the potentially huge changes that lie ahead for PC gamers...

HE NEXT
RATION

Sony and Nintendo may have ruled the aisles with the latest consumer titles for their ageing consoles, but with neither talking about next-generation console plans, the real action at ECTS was occurring on the upper levels. In one corner stalked the new hot kid on the block, Nvidia. Fresh from a recent flotation on the NASDAQ stock exchange and buoyed by the technical strength of its TNT2 chip, the San Jose company was in fighting mode, premiering the features of its latest revolutionary chip, the GeForce 256, to the European press.

Across the hall sat the gamers' favourite, 3dfx. Resplendent with its Californian slacker slogan, 'So powerful it's kind of ridiculous', it too was in combative mood. Blessed with great retail awareness thanks to the millions spent on marketing the Voodoo brand, 3dfx knew that its current board, the Voodoo 3000, was the biggest global seller during July. And while rumours suggesting its new chip, codenamed Napalm, was suffering delays, its technology briefings were as packed as Nvidia's press conference.





One of Nvidia's key demos for its GeForce chip was this impressive tree, seen in wireframe (right) and with lighting (left)







3dfx's T-Buffer enables cinematic effects such as depth of field (top) and motion blur (above)

Also in attendance, but less prominent, were the rest of the pack: Matrox, S3, ATI and 3DLabs. Despite not being as fashionable as some of their rivals, Matrox and ATI remain large 3D board manufacturers with products targeting the whole range of solutions from gamers to business users. Matrox, in particular, has recently received an impressive amount of support for the environmental bump mapping and dualhead functionality of its G400 board.

"I get a large allocation of boards to send to developers but the demand is crazy," explains **Jason Della Rocca**, Matrox's developer relations manager. "We send out 100 boards a week, and the queue is still hundreds deep." S3, on the other hand, is in the midst of buying graphics-board manufacturer Diamond, one of the many vertical deals that have characterised the 3D market of late. Its next-generation chip, the Savage2000, has just been announced, and it is currently working on a completely new 'project X' chip architecture. "The industry's on a very steep ramp in terms of performance increase at present, and we are on that ramp as well," S3's chairman **Ken Potashner** bullishly told **Edge**.

It was Nvidia that took the plaudits, however. Even in an industry that expects generational leaps, with Moore's Law predicting the doubling of the number of transistors per chip every 18 months, jaws hit the floor when the GeForce chip was shown. "We're going faster than Moore's Law," **Derek Perez**, Nvidia's PR manager, proudly stated. While Intel's Pentium III chip contains nine million transistors, the GeForce has an incredible 23 million. And while not all transistors are equal, the scale of the technical achievement in itself is impressive. Nvidia is already marketing the chip as the world's first Geometry Processing Unit.

Creative Labs, one of the first board manufacturers to ship a product based on the GeForce, cheekily reckons that using the GeForce with a PII 300 will give the same performance as a PIII 450 with the chip.

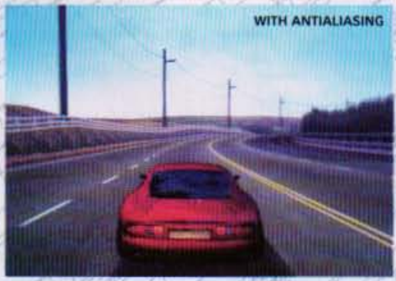
More importantly for game developers, however, was the news that the GeForce would be the first graphics chip to support hardware Transform and Lighting (T&L) functions as detailed in the latest iteration of Microsoft's DirectX instruction set. Transform and lighting are obviously the most CPU intensive stages of creating any 3D scene, the transform function calculating the co-ordinates of 3D objects and environments as they pass through the 3D pipeline to be outputted on the 2D screen, while the lighting calculates all the vectors, from lights to objects, in the 3D scene. GeForce will remove this entire load from the CPU, allowing it to be used for other purposes such as better artificial intelligence, physics and collision detection. The point of interest of hardware T&L for gamers, however, is the increased amount of polygons it allows developers to throw around. Photorealistic realtime graphics, the holy grail of so many developers, just got one step closer.

Looking real

In contrast to the muscle of GeForce, 3dfx concentrated on demoing its realtime cinematic effects. Its T-Buffer technology highlights subtle techniques such as antialiasing, motion blur and depth-of-field focusing. Although only one strand of its Napalm chip, which isn't now expected to ship until next year, 3dfx was suggesting that more polygons are not necessarily the complete answer to better graphics. Although obviously when Napalm does arrive, it too will feature hardware T&L.

Chief of T-Buffer effects is full-screen spatial antialiasing. Along with smoothing out jaggies, this also tackles similar problems caused by the polygon 'popping' of thin objects moving relative to the screen. Interestingly, it's not a technology developers need to support *per se*, as it merely





With little developer support apparent for the T-Buffer, 3dfx was reduced to demonstrating the smoothing of its full-screen spatial antialiasing with help from *Need For Speed 3*



fixes problems associated with bandwidth limitations of PCs. Both motion blur and depth of field are byproducts of the antialiasing technology, which allows multiple images of any portion of a scene to be rendered in real time. For example, for motion blur, multiple images of any moving objects would be added, whereas with depth of field they would be added to the entire screen, minus the portion of the image to remain in focus. In addition to the T-Buffer, 3dfx also announced its FXT1 open-source, cross-platform texture-compression technology. However, the inclusion of S3TC into the feature set of DirectX7 made this something of an academic issue for PC developers.

More worrying for a company that has basked in its reputation as the fastest and the best, there was little reaction from developers, aside from a testimonial from the producer of *Halo*, a game that had already been demoed during the GeForce press conference. And while 3dfx says it expects developers to create their own effects based on the T-Buffer technology, most seem nonplussed by it.

Feeding the beast

The situation was completely different for Nvidia. It embarked on a programme to get a select group of developers on board prior to announcing the chip. "We didn't really broadcast it wildly to begin with," explains **Christopher Donahue**, manager of Nvidia's developer relations group. But after the news broke, developers' reactions have verged on the ecstatic. **Tim Sweeney**, founder and lead programmer at Epic, simply said "Holy shit," succinctly summing up the overall mood.

One of the first games to support it is Computer Artworks' *Evolva*. Prior to GeForce its character models were running at around 700 polygons. In contrast, the optimised version of the game uses 7,000 polygons, with 13 creatures on screen at any one time. "Originally we had details that ordinarily you couldn't see," explains **Mark Atkinson**, Computer Artworks' technical director. "The GeForce is the first thing to allow us to tessellate them out. Now our realtime poly levels are slightly higher than what was set for the FMV sequences."

Of course, it helps that all *Evolva*'s content was designed to be scaleable from the off. "One thing that is fairly unusual is that we used DirectX for all the transform and lighting right from the start," Atkinson continues. "Most developers are still using their own code, but we made the decision early that the DirectX stuff would be good." And it was this foresight that ensured that a minimum of work was needed to get *Evolva* working with GeForce. Computer Artworks received a prototype board with alpha drivers a few weeks before ECTS. The DirectX7 port took a weekend.



One of the first games to show the benefits of GeForce's power is *Evolva*. The number of polys per model has jumped tenfold, as the before and after wireframes below clearly show



When confronted with Geforce, Tim Sweeney, founder of Epic, simply said, "Holy shit"

■ Mark Atkinson ■ technical director, Computer Artworks



On hardware transform and lighting and the next generation

"I think hardware T&L will just become accepted. I'd draw an analogy with hardware rasterisation: when Voodoo 1 came out, it was amazing. It could draw huge triangles in no time at all, which used to take up 50% of your CPU time in software. So it's exactly the same case with hardware T&L now. It will just be accepted that transforms just happen and don't take any time. We'll forget that they ever did and become used to the fact that the card draws the graphics.

"For the next generation of chips, I think it's got to go to higher-order perimeters. Already if you draw the *Evolva* stuff with wireframes it comes out virtually solid. But once you get triangles getting down to pixel sizes and sub-pixel sizes, you start running into a limit. What's the point? So the only place to go to get past this pixel-per-triangle barrier is higher-order perimeters, things like patches or NURBs, and then displacement maps on them for the surface detail. I think it will take a little time to get to that point but when the first stuff comes out it will be defining it in software and then tesselating it into triangles."





Taken from a game called *Experience*, from WXP, the Dagoth Moor Zoological Gardens level showed the graphical quality that should become standard thanks to the introduction of hardware T&L on the new wave of 3D cards



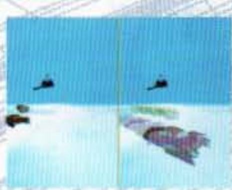
"We asked WXP if they wanted to work on Geforce, and I don't think they've slept since"

"I had to redo all the interfaces, but it didn't take long until we got it up and running," remembers Atkinson. And even though the code wasn't optimised, it didn't seem to matter that the chip was drawing four times as many vertices as it needed. "The GeForce was so fast, it didn't seem to care," is Atkinson's understated take on the situation.

Other games that promise to support the hardware include *Quake III: Arena*, Rage's racing title *Midnight GT*, Bungie's *Halo*, and *Experience*, the debut game from WXP, a small Seattle-based developer. It was the first developer Nvidia got on board, with its initial work being demonstrated during the press conference. Entitled the Dagoth Moor Zoological Garden, this demo level showed off both the high poly counts as well as the realtime lighting and environment mapping that can be carried out.

"They're a bunch of sharp guys who we have been working with," explained Nvidia's Donahue. "We visited them and saw their engine and said 'Do you guys want to work on GeForce?' That was a month and a half ago, and I don't think they've slept since," he laughs. Other high-profile games are bound to feature on GeForce's support list soon too. According to Mark Atkinson, it's a no-brainer for any game utilising level of detail or progressive mesh technology. Nvidia's Derek Perez agrees: "The more we tell people about it, the more they're getting on board." Indeed, such is the level of enthusiasm that at Microsoft's Meltdown developers were going back to their hotel rooms and writing code. "Planet Moon's Scott Guest got the software development kit, made a CD, went to his hotel room, and came back the next morning with a version of *Giants*," says Perez. "We tested it and it ran."

But no matter how quick the code is to implement, the most interesting aspect of the GeForce is what developers will use the CPU for now it has been freed from the toil of T&L calculations. "We've removed a lot of the load from the CPU, and that means developers' learning curve has gone up because now they have the ability to invest more in physics and AI," says Chris Donahue. "There are a couple of guys that we've talked





Motion blur is just one of the byproducts from the spatial antialiasing of T-Buffer. 3dfx also expects developers to create their own visual effects based on the technology

■ Jason Della Rocca ■ developer relations manger, Matrox



On the future of 3D cards

"Fill rate is still a big, big issue. Developers can never get enough passes of alpha and particle effects, which still takes a lot of fill. Hardware T&L is on our roadmap and everybody else's roadmap. Everyone is trying to get closer to PlayStation2 performance. Faster chips and more texture pipeline are important too, and the GeForce has quad rendering pipelines. One of the major issues is bus contention: the more polys you use, the more they are fighting to get out of the buffer at the same time as the textures. Anything you can do to reduce the bandwidth speeds of either of those two areas, the better off you are. Developers also want high-resolution texture support in conjunction with texture compression, so they can move to 1Kx1K and 2Kx2K textures. The G400 will do this at the moment, but the problem is that it won't compress them so you have massive bandwidth needs. So what developers want is to be able to do those texture sizes but shrink them down via compression. GeForce supports S3TC, and I think the next 3dfx board will have it, and it's on our roadmap. Basically, faster is always better..."



DMA's *Wild Metal Country* supports bump mapping as well as the dualhead features of Matrox's G400 card. The dualhead functionality is used for an extra map screen

■ Playing with dualhead



Although it requires gamers to have two computer monitors, the G400's dualhead feature allows developers to throw another camera view onto the secondary screen as with Silicon Dreams' *War Monkeys* (top). Alternatively, they can zoom in on the action as seen in *Star Trek: Armada* (above)

to who have some pretty good ideas about what they are going to use it for," he continues cryptically. "Valve is really excited, and its AI was okay to begin with."

Supporting the G400

Key to the impact of the GeForce has been its proximity to the release of DirectX7 and its new features. Probably the key instruction set for PC developers, the latest iteration of DirectX not only supports hardware T&L, but cube environmental mapping, vertex blending and particle systems. Aware of the importance of Microsoft's group of technologies, Nvidia has made sure that GeForce supports the entire suite.

A similar strategy certainly worked when Matrox was considering what features from DirectX6 to support in its current G400 chip. It decided on environmental bump mapping and the dualhead output, which allows gamers to use an additional screen when playing a game.

"They weren't mistakes as such, but they did just kind of happen," jokes Jason Della Rocca. "In the case of bump mapping we looked at the DirectX6 specification, and said, 'We'd better put it in because everybody else will be doing it, and if we don't do it we'll be screwed'." As it turned out, the G400 was the only chip to include the feature. Similarly with the dualhead option. This niche functionality was required for post-production work on one of Matrox's high-end business cards. "We left it on the consumer-level board and it's become this great feature for us," Della Rocca explains.

However, such features are patently useless unless developers actually support them. One game that managed to utilise both was DMA's *Wild Metal Country*, which is still to be released in the States. Following an OEM deal between Gremlin and Matrox, DMA added bump mapping to the game's terrain, giving it a more solid look. Dualhead allowed DMA to rectify a criticism from the European release of the game.

"With the opportunity to use the second monitor, we decided to put a map screen on it," says **Pat Kerr**, *Wild Metal Country*'s lead programmer. "It was something we'd thought about including in the original game but ultimately didn't. It changes the game in as much as one of the problems of the game in its original form is it's too easy to get lost. We also bump mapped the map screen to make it look more interesting."

Yet while 3D chips will continue to allow developers to create better-looking games with more polygons per frame, the key point of the next-generation chips that support hardware T&L will be how developers use the opportunity to improve physics and AI.

"I think it will depend on the sort of games developers are trying to do and what the public are willing to buy," says Kerr, mindful of the less-than-sparkling retail performance of *Wild Metal Country*. "We've put a lot of effort into physics and AI at the expense of graphics, but people go for eye candy. They don't seem to appreciate the extra layer of immersion physics can bring to a game." Every 3D chip revolution makes games look more realistic. The more interesting question is, will this one make them play more realistically?



(Top) The one game used to show off GeForce was Bungie's *Halo*, while the boat on the water demo (above) displayed the card's cube environment mapping capabilities



***Dungeon Keeper 2* and *BattleZone II* are among the wealth of current games that have shipped supporting the G400's environmental bump mapping. Although it doesn't add any additional gameplay features, there's no question that it makes titles look considerably more realistic**

TESTSCREEN

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

Wheeling out the formula

If **E**75's Prescreen intro concerning the endless run of football games making it to market failed to highlight one of the industry's major flaws – that is, the seemingly unshakeable fear among publishers to step out of the realm of the proven and into the land of innovation – then perhaps the state of affairs evident this month is better testament. Simply put, how many more F1 games can gamers possibly tolerate?

The situation is bordering on the ludicrous. Not a month goes by without some form of F1-related title featuring somewhere in **Edge**. The fact that many are competent recreations of the sport is beside the point. Their existence simply reeks of utter desperation.

There are notable exceptions in the publishing field, of course. Codemasters, for example, could easily have turned to F1, with almost certain success, when it decided to enter the driving game circuit. Instead it chose touring cars, a sport then growing in popularity though still largely unknown to, or ignored by, the masses. There are countless areas within the massive motorsports arena that would provide excellent videogame source material, yet most publishers appear incapable of looking beyond the obvious.

One particular type of racing game needs only to enjoy a relative amount of success for a string of publishers to follow in the same tyre tracks. You couldn't have failed to notice how many *GT* clones revved their engines after Polyphony's title lead the way, or the amount of rally titles following *Colin McCrae*.

When Psygnosis' first PlayStation F1 game emerged back in 1996, it was following a quiet period for this particular sub-genre. It took a couple of years until publishers realised that F1-based titles were selling well, but now, everywhere you look, every man and his dog – including the likes of Eidos, Sony, Video System, Ubi Soft, Microprose, EA and Acclaim – appears to have an F1 title in development, most boasting the not-so-exclusive FIA/FOA licence.

This state of affairs would be less grim if the lion's share of these new F1 games managed to better what they attempt to copy (there are some illustrious, easy-to-follow templates out there already, after all), yet most are miserable, substandard examples attempting a swift (and painfully obvious) cash-in.

If you can't even equal the quality of a current genre-leader, why bother wasting developers' time? More importantly, though, stop wasting players' money.





Spot the indifference: this month's *Formula One '99* (left), and *F1 World Grand Prix* (centre), with EA's Visual Sciences-developed entry into *Formula 1* (right) bound to follow their slipstream. Excited?

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. A game receiving a 'seven out of ten', for example, is a very competent title with noticeable flaws but which should still appeal to a considerable range of players. It does, after all, score two points above average and should therefore not be considered average.

Edge's rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten.

Videogames on the Edge

The month's digital diet, thanks to Edge's newly installed Super Famicom Jr.



Super Mario World (SNES) Nintendo
Arguably better than its 64bit incarnation, perhaps the Super Famicom's finest hour. The compulsion to conquer all 96 levels remains today.



Super Mario Kart (SNES) Nintendo
One of the most playable titles ever created? Absolutely. A ten-minute spin on this puts the likes of *Speed Freaks* and *Crash Team Racing* to shame.



PilotWings (SNES) Nintendo
A radical departure from everything that had gone before, NCL needs more moments of inspiration such as this if it is to make Dolphin a success.



Super Bomberman (SNES) Hudson Soft
Friendships have frayed over it, relationships have been strained, university degrees almost failed. One of the most evilly addictive games ever known to man.

Index

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP





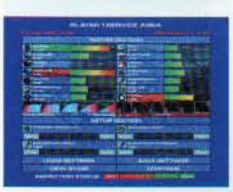


Easily done, this (above), and damaged bodywork, collapsed suspension, engine overheating, shattered windows, and much more usually ensues



The sensation of controlling a rally machine using the game's superb in-car view is magnificent (above). The car models are truly impressive (top)





Twoplayer action is supported by one machine while an eightplayer network option also offered (top). Between stages, you're allowed a strict time limit for repairs

In opening, it's worth pointing out that *Rally Championship* is being reviewed here on the basis of it being a simulation. The reason for this disclaimer-like statement is the nature of the game which, like the excellent *Grand Prix Legends* before it, targets dedicated racing fans first and foremost. And like *GPL*, a high-end PC with a steering wheel (preferably force feedback) is highly recommended – it's just not the same without them. Unlike *GPL*, however, Magnetic Fields' rough roader does offer an immersive arcade option (complete with reversed stages and CPU cars to overtake along the way), its forgiving dynamics and reduced damage providing a very accessible entry point into the world of digital rallying.

But it would be fair to say that the majority of *Rally Championship*'s initial devotees are likely to be looking for its simulation aspects. Thankfully, they won't be disappointed. No other game has previously captured the essence of rallying and reproduced it to this level of detail. *Colin McRae* is a wonderful game, but its core does reside in arcade-style gameplay, which in itself is not a criticism, simply a different way of doing things. Here, reality reigns. Yes, even in its highest simulation setting the handling has been mildly tweaked to ensure playability, but rest assured the dynamics are first class. Anyone who's ever had the chance to attempt to hold a powerslide around a wide, loose surface-covered bend or race through a tree-lined muddy track at indecent velocity in a rally-prepared vehicle is unlikely to find a better approximation of this sport. The sensation of racing such a vehicle (particularly when using the magnificent in-car view) is without equal.











Night-driving can make things even more exhilarating (right) but even in daylight the constant quest to be the fastest through the stage can often end in drama (top left)

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Europress**

Developer: **Magnetic Fields**

Price: **£30**

Release: **Out now**







Being a realistic rally sim, you can see into the car during replays, with the driver steering and changing gears and the co-driver looking down at pace notes (centre). It won't stay clean for long (above)

Initially, only A5 class (super-mini) cars are available, but completing several championships eventually sees you unlocking the A8 World Rally Cars, hence obtaining all 23 vehicles. Unsurprisingly, all feature accurate modelling, genuine decals, individual engine noise, handling characteristics, superbly recreated interiors and an informative co-driver.

If the cars are realistically recreated, then you'd expect no less from the game's 36 stages (six rallies with six courses each) that constitute the Mobil 1 British Rally Championship – the game's licence. In total, approximately 420 miles of Ordnance Survey-licensed mapped roads from the corners of the UK await discovery, complete with appropriate atmospheric conditions. And because this is a simulation of a real event, expect authentically lengthened stages – over ten minutes of frantic wheel action and absolute concentration per section is not uncommon. Furthermore, in between them you get only a limited amount of time to repair any damaged incurred from a moment's lapse in concentration or over-enthusiastic use of the accelerator pedal. The amount of parameters that can be affected by things going awry is suitably comprehensive, of course.

Niggles? Well, some of the collisions can seem a little odd, but thankfully this is a rare occurrence. Fictional stages would have allowed the designers to build amazingly exciting sections at every turn, though to be fair there's hardly a dull moment in the game. It probably won't appeal to the average arcade racing aficionado – this being hardcore sim territory there's little evidence of the gameplay structure so well implemented by Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally*, for example. Yet the game's calibre may end up converting a fair number of players to reality-based racers.

Thoroughly absorbing and rarely anything less than thrilling, *Championship* is a revelation.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

It would be fair to say that the majority of *Rally Championship*'s **initial devotees are** likely to be looking for its simulation aspects. **They won't be disappointed**



The terrain depends on the rally location but expect gravel, mud, Tarmac, and snow among others

BIOHAZARD 3: LAST ESCAPE



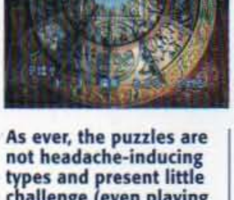






Complete the game to unlock all five of Jill's extra zombie-killing outfits (centre), including *Dino Crisis*' Regina suit (above)





As ever, the puzzles are not headache-inducing types and present little challenge (even playing the Japanese version). But some of them have random cycles (above)



While nearly all of the game is spent controlling Jill (above), one section is cleared playing as Carlos the friendly mercenary (top)

Set immediately before and after the events of *Biohazard 2*, Capcom's third instalment (sixth if you count the *Director's Cut* and Dual Shock versions) of its highly popular shocker franchise has been unleashed on to the Japanese market, whose fervent anticipation of the title has seen over a million units pass over the counter in the first week alone – and usually that kind of success cannot simply be attributed to hype. (Having said that, how many copies did *Mission: Impossible* sell in the US?)

By now you should know the score: zombies litter the environments, and it's your task to guide your polygonal hero/heroine to safety while releasing as many undead from their lifeless curse as you deem necessary, all the while enduring badly acted cut-scenes, gorgeous FMV, and a wafer-thin plot. It's all become part of the *Biohazard*

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**

Release: **Out now (Japan) December (UK)**







Nemesis (left) appears throughout the game attempting to halt your progress. You can usually flee him





***The Mercenaries*, like the *4th Survivor* found in *Biohazard 2*, is a bonus game that can be played once the main game is completed. It's surprisingly addictive**

mould, and thankfully *Last Escape* doesn't stray anywhere near far enough off the beaten track to break it.

That isn't to say that this is an exact copy of previous *Biohazard* titles. Naturally, most of the familiar puzzle-solving, door-unlocking structure returns, but subtle gameplay additions have been included. The quick 180-degree turn from *Dino Crisis* (this time requiring a direction-and-button combination) has made a welcome appearance and improves the fluidity of the gameplay, while with a swift shoulder button press it's also possible to dodge certain zombie attacks. More interesting is the opportunity to manufacture your own handgun, shotgun, Magnum or grenade rounds, introducing an – albeit rudimentary – element of resource management into the series. Moreover, the way you are given the choice of action during some of the game's more poignant instances is also impressive. For example, when facing Nemesis you usually have the option of evading the tenacious mutant from hell or, if you're feeling particularly valiant, confronting him. Either choice eventually brings you back into the narrative's linearity, but it does makes matters a little more interesting for anyone replaying the game in search of extra bonus items.

Which conveniently brings us to the game's additional features. Admittedly, veteran Biohazardists won't take weeks to survive their way through *Last Escape*'s seven main areas, even on the harder setting. But after the last FMV sequence has ended there's more than just the customary key allowing you to change your character's textured clothes – *The Mercenaries: Operation Mad Jackal* is a bonus game in which you get to pick one of three mercenaries you come across in the game proper. The aim is to fight your way from one end of the map to another in a strict time limit and with a finite armaments supply. Shooting zombies and saving civilians rewards you with extra time and additional supplies respectively, and financial benefits await the bravest players. Once enough is amassed, the money can be used to purchase weapons with unlimited ammo, which in turn can be taken into the main game. It's certainly a worthy addition.

> ***Operation Mad Jackal*** is a bonus game in which you get to pick one of three mercenaries you **meet in the game proper**. The aim is to fight your way from one end of the map to **another within a strict time limit**

Ultimately, if you've enjoyed past *Biohazards*, you'll relish *Last Escape*. Yes, it's mostly more of the same, but such is the quality of Capcom's horror series that this remains thoroughly engrossing stuff.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Look familiar? Because the action takes place in Racoon City, *Last Escape* shares some of its locations with those found in *Biohazard 2*, such as the police HQ

TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Eidos**

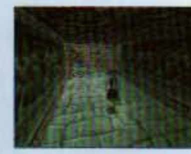
Developer: **Core Design**

Price: **£30**

Release: **Out now**











Environment mapping furnishes *The Last Revelation*'s locales with an extra layer of atmosphere. It's simple trickery, but it greatly enhances the architecture



The Last Revelation uses in-game set pieces to great effect. After all, participation matters





The ability to combine items is demonstrated by the laser sight (above). Affixed to either a crossbow or revolver, it allows Lara to snipe from afar

The Last Revelation is the best *Tomb Raider* game since the 1996 debut of the franchise. Mindful that *Tomb Raider III* was guilty of preaching to the converted, its sprawling maps too testing for all but the hardcore fan, Core has engineered the most radical overhaul of its trusty blueprint so far. The importance of switch- and key-based puzzles has been reduced, along with the attendant aimless wandering endemic to both. To fill this obvious challenge void, individually programmed mysteries must be solved to secure further progression.

From playing Twenty Squares (an ancient, draughts-like board game) with a statue of a deity, to reading essential inscriptions with binoculars, *The Last Revelation* is rather more involved than its forebears. To help players cope with this additional complexity, Lara now carries a diary that offers important reminders and clues. But – and this is of equal importance – *TLR* recaptures the atmosphere that made its ultimate predecessor so very compelling. This is enhanced by the inclusion of 40 minutes of cut-scenes and a well-designed 'floating' camera, used to illustrate various events. With all but the first two levels (out of over 30) set in Egypt, more time is dedicated to spinning a typically over-the-top yarn rather than explaining why Lara travels from one locale to another.

The problem with this PC release of *The Last Revelation* is, quintessentially, its PlayStation counterpart. It pushes Sony's machine to its very limits, yet runs comfortably on a humble P200 with a 3D card. By catering for the lowest common denominator – the PlayStation mass market – *The Last Revelation* is a far less ambitious project than it could (and, from an elitist perspective, should) have been.

An excellent videogame, but, lacking revolutionary intent, a 'mere' sequel, despite its considerable charms.

Edge rating:

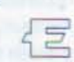
Eight out of ten





Although *TLR*'s maps are guilty of the occasional indiscretion – too much wandering, perhaps – on the whole they remain thoughtfully designed





You play a 16-year-old on levels one and two – a fair premise for a training mode

HYDRO THUNDER

Format: **Dreamcast**	
Publisher: **Midway**	
Developer: **Eurocom**	
Price: **£40**	
Release: **Out now**	





The number of ramps is such that you'll spend a great amount of time airborne




Collecting boost icons (left) and then firing up your hydro jets on the straight sections (right) is the pathway to success in *Hydro Thunder*

Coin-op conversions nowadays are usually filled to bursting point with extra options, time trial modes and super championships. It is fitting to the spirit of *Hydro Thunder*, though, that Midway has ignored all that malarkey. Make no mistake, this is a pure arcade romp: start on 'Easy' level, race through three tracks, go onto 'Medium', race through three tracks and then go on to 'Hard'.

There's an initial choice of three boats – one stable, one fast, one a compromise between the two – with more to be unlocked later. The visuals, while not exactly awe-inspiring, are certainly impressive. Background scenery is detailed and varies from theme parks to icy wastelands to ship graveyards. There are some great anarchic touches too: police launches speed past and try to halt the racers, canoeists get tragically caught in the way, and a flooded New York has submerged taxi cabs just visible beneath the waves. The addition of dozens of secret routes also adds to the fun – looking for that hidden tunnel or waterfall entrance to shave seconds off a lap time draws you in to these bizarre and twisted worlds.

As a racer, *Hydro Thunder* is a hard game to judge. While zooming along the twisting waterways at high speed is undoubtedly enjoyable, handling the boats in the early stages is merely a matter of opening the throttle and picking up the boost icons – just hit all the courses at the terminal velocity of an ICBM and you'll be fine. Only on the three 'Hard' tracks are such advanced tactics as braking and observing the racing line needed.

On the other hand, if it's exciting manoeuvres and OTT jumps you want – leaping over precipices, plummeting hundreds of feet into the seething surf and motoring on – then look no further. *Hydro Thunder* has ramps and jumps a plenty. Onlookers will audibly gasp as you take flight, overtake three boats *and* clip a mountain in the process.

Fundamentally, this is an experience rather than a simulation. It's frustrating – simply missing a single boost can make the difference between qualifying and being an also-ran. The erratic behaviour of the other pilots doesn't help – whoever coded the AI has suffered too much traffic-jam road rage. It can be pot luck getting through the pack without a major pile-up – competitors will try to sail straight through you.

Ultimately, this is mad nautical gaming – aggressive, surreal and compulsive. Sometimes shallow, it is not *Mario Kart* on water, more a damp *Driver* – full of noticeable flaws, but a lot of fun.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten





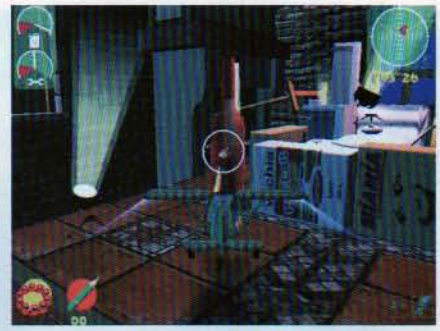

Background scenery is impressively detailed and well drawn at times. There is also very little slowdown, even in the full-on twoplayer mode

TOY COMMANDER

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega Europe**
Developer: **No Cliché**
Price: **£40**
Release: **Out now**



'Neeeeeeyow', 'dagga dagga' and other fine childhood play warcrys are rekindled by No Cliché's first title





Throughout the game, there's a torrential amount of visual detail for your eyes to soak up. If nothing else, graphically this is a next-gen title









Missions are highly varied, such as having to collect water bombs to extinguish sizzling firecrackers (top). The cat can be blasted into waking (above)

Who would have guessed that the minds behind *Alone in the Dark* would take such a tangential change of direction and create *Toy Commander*? The first of SOE's 1.5-party games (based in southern France, No Cliché is entirely financed by Sega Europe) to emerge blinking into the public spotlight, *Toy Commander* is a fresh take on the classic 'if toys were alive' storyline.

The player is placed in the role of Guthy, a careless young boy who has lost control of his toy collection to the rebellious teddy bear, Hugolin. With the aid of the toys remaining loyal to Guthy, you must battle through dozens of mission-based levels, defeat several end-of-level bosses and complete various sub-games. These are set in the rooms of Guthy's home, all rendered with commendable finesse, though the decor is somewhat questionable.

There's clearly a lot of gameplay to sample, topped off with Dreamcast's first simultaneous fourplayer mode, which has all the expected variations (deathmatch, capture the flag, team battles). Sadly, while options abound, playability doesn't due to an awkward viewpoint coupled with complex settings which too often leave you disorientated.

While the plot is childlike, playing the game reveals a surprisingly complex set of missions – and a skill requirement far higher than many might expect. In order to reach the intermediate boss stages, and eventually the showdown with Hugolin, you must complete the standard levels within set amounts of time. These targets are remarkably ambitious, ensuring that hours of dedicated play – or seething frustration – are required to complete the game.

There's a delightful attention to detail throughout *Toy Commander*, in terms of both presentation and game design. The toy types have been divided into transport and attack, so that differing tactical approaches can be used to complete the levels.

Toy Commander is a hard game to assess; so much of the design intention and innovation is worthy of investing playing time in that the sometimes fiddly nature of it all doesn't quite spoil the party. If the multiplayer element had been a little bit more polished, and the control system made more fluid, then *Commander* might have delivered a surprise attack instead of merely raising the player's eyebrow.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten





While *Toy Commander*'s fourplayer mode is an appealing prospect, playing soon reveals control and camera systems that do little but annoy

F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX









Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Video System**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **£40**

Release: **Out now**



Slowdown can occasionally rear its head, although it's never enough to distract you from the proceedings. At least a 60Hz PAL option is offered

You may have had enough of F1 games by now, but this month sees two more arrive as software publishers struggle to come up with more innovative motorsports-related products (see Testscreen intro, p69).

Load up *F1WGP* and you'll find all 11 cars and 22 drivers (in respective 1998 liveries/regulations – Psygnosis' *Formula One '99* is currently the only F1 game with the 1999 season's stats) awaiting selection. Of course, this authenticity extends to the now-familiar 16 circuits, with every corner, gravel trap and grandstand exactly where it should be.

Perhaps disappointingly, yet like so many contemporary F1 games, you can jump straight into the best car (McLaren/Ferrari) and compete in a championship year. Older videogaming F1 fans will remember that it was customary for such titles to offer players the opportunity to work their way up the F1 team ladder as a gameplaying incentive (see *Super F1 Circus* in Retroview, p116).

The action, even on the easiest setting, has a penchant for the simulation side of the realism balance. That's not to say this makes it impossible to keep your wheels on the tarmac long enough to complete a couple of circuits (as it happens, cars in *F1WGP* are suspiciously robust, and damage, as always, is optional), but it does occasionally serve as a reminder that Dreamcast's analogue pad is not the best contraption for steering a realistically handling 700bhp machine weighing a measly 600Kg. Nevertheless, after several laps (and a little analogue-steering sensitivity tweaking), you get used to it to the point of enjoying pushing your vehicle close to its limits, but serious polygonal F1 racing fans may wish to invest in a steering wheel.

The challenging yet satisfying handling dynamics are complemented by a wealth of detail (grass/gravel on tyres, rubber marks on kerbs, extensive damage, safety car, flags, penalties, dynamic weather), but some noticeable omissions are made, particularly for a title that sells itself more on the simulation aspect than simple arcade gaming. As a result, *F1WGP* at times fails to capture the spirit of the sport it attempts to depict. You can't help feeling that something is missing. But then it does have strengths over Psygnosis' effort, the most obvious being the way the car behaves on (and off) the track.

Ironically, marrying *F1 World GP* and *Formula One '99* would have produced a killer title. With such a prospect naturally unlikely, you're left instead with two good, significantly different interpretations of F1 racing for the home.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten





The awards ceremony (top) makes a welcome comeback after being ignored by so many F1 games. Further attention to detail extends to the pitstop

WIN BACK

Format: **N64**

Publisher: **Koei**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **$50 (£35)**

Release: **Out now (US/Japan); TBA (UK)**







Weaponry is kept to a bare minimum – pistol, shotgun, machine gun – with the odd exception, such as the rare but powerful rocket launcher (top left)





Everything is hidden behind a heavy shroud of fog, making the backgrounds look dull and murky. At least the characters are fairly well animated, though

When it was first shown to the public at 1998's E3, it was hoped that Koei's promising stealth shoot 'em up would be the N64's own *Metal Gear Solid* and a genuine successor to *GoldenEye*. More than a year later, the developer has failed to address the problems with foggy graphics and simplistic textures that gave rise to doubts about the game's ability to live up to its potential. If *Win Back* doesn't look spectacular, though, it's certainly playable.

Like *MGS*, *Win Back* has one very good idea which is repeated countless times, from the opening scenes to the encounter with the final boss. In this case it's a combat system which works like a set-piece shootout from any number of American cop shows. The hero, Jean-Luc, hides around a corner, keeping his back to the wall, then leaps out to pump a few bullets into the bad guys before ducking back behind the wall to reload. The controls take a little getting used to, since the Z-trigger is used to duck rather than to fire, but it works well thanks to an automatic target which locks onto the nearest enemy the moment Jean-Luc breaks cover.

Since the game is almost entirely about shooting rather than exploration, Jean-Luc doesn't have the ability to jump or climb. This reveals some annoying holes in the paper-thin plot, not least during the first level. A long and violent trek around an enemy complex finishes right next to the starting position because an essential key was hidden behind a waist-high wall. Surely Koei could have been more sensitive to its acrophobic hero's embarrassing (for a crack special agent) problem, and at least have had the decency to make the wall truly unscaleable.



The duck-and-run combat makes simple ambushes very effective

Win Back's biggest drawback, however, is its camera. When aiming at anything, Jean-Luc is rooted to the spot, so fighting the bosses or any other enemies inhabiting large arenas is more problematic than the standard corridor battles. The need to keep switching between aiming and moving often confuses the camera into losing track of the action, resulting in some frustrating and undeserved deaths.

Despite its faults, *Win Back* is still an enjoyable title – not least because it's one of a select group of N64 games with human enemies and semi-realistic environments. Although it isn't in the same league as *GoldenEye* or *MGS*, a miscellany of multiplay options should help to prolong *WinBack*'s life after the three oneplayer difficulty settings have been conquered.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



Unfortunately for those hoping for a little gritty realism, there's no blood. The red flash indicates a Lethal Hit – a single shot to the head or back

FORMULA ONE '99

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SCEE/Psygnosis**

Developer: **Studio 33**

Price: **£35**

Release: **Out now**





The *F1'99* package is impressive: speed is excellently conveyed, cars feature environmental mapping, and the 1999 stats bring a new circuit (top right)





Studio 33 has done well in implementing the 1999 livery

The fourth in a series that was first to provide PlayStation owners with the potential thrill of racing wheel-to-wheel down Silverstone's start/finish straight, negotiating Spa's Eau Rouge complex flat out in sixth, or racing into Monaco's Casino Square at 100mph, *F1'99* is also easily the best. Programmed by the developer previously responsible for the mildly enjoyable *Newman Haas Racing*, this is kilometres ahead of Visual Sciences' disastrous *F1'98*.

Perhaps appropriately, the most immediately striking aspect is visual. All of the tracks are impressively faithful recreations of their real-life equivalents, including perceptible changes in gradient so often missing from other F1 games. The draw distance is also commanding, and together with the restrained colour scheme goes a long way to provide an environment of un-PlayStation-like solidity.

The other noticeable element is the amount of detail and the quality of presentation that has gone into *F1'99*: the safety car is included, as is the pit lane speed limiter, a circuit preview (narrated by ITV F1 man Martin Brundle), and a weekend weather forecast service. Mika Salo is available as the replacement for Michael Schumacher (famously forced out of this year's season after breaking a leg at Silverstone), and while the starting grid is displayed onscreen, the cars complete their warm-up lap weaving from side to side as if they're priming their tyres. With every F1 game offering the usual single race, championship and extensive set-up menu, attention to detail becomes highly significant.

Once the red lights have gone out (yes, it is possible to incur a penalty for jump starting – all of the regulations can be toggled on or off), controlling the vehicle digitally feels convincingly heavy rather than the usual light, overly nervous feel usually conveyed by F1 games. The other drivers' AI is also an improvement over past attempts, although, ironically, the way a CPU-controlled car twitches violently out of the way as you overtake it can at times feel a little too artificial (at least they refrain from driving into you this time). The only real problem occurs when hit something, your car behaving erratically, and momentarily shattering the finely conveyed illusion of controlling a 700bhp machine.

Which ultimately means, despite a few inevitable niggles, that you end up with the best Formula One game currently available on the PlayStation. Cynics may argue that this is hardly a feat given the glut of F1-related releases Sony's 32bit box has played host to in recent times. Nevertheless, that doesn't undermine the fact that this remains an accomplished and worthwhile motor racing title.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







It's taken a while, but the safety car finally comes out in an F1 game (top). Oddly, cars only suffer structural damage after many collisions (centre). Twoplayer works well





Unlike Psygnosis' previous *F1* titles, separate arcade/sim modes aren't offered. Instead, you set the proceedings' tone via the options selected

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **The Learning Company**

Developer: **Red Orb**

Price: **£40**

Release: **Out now**











A wide range of moves and some excellent animation ensure that *Prince of Persia 3D*'s combat sequences are highly enjoyable (above left), while several of the scenes fondly recall the flavour of the original (above right)





The atmosphere and detail lavished on *Prince of Persia 3D* go some way to offsetting the cumbersome character control and fiddly gameplay

It's fitting that exactly ten years on from Jordan Mechner's groundbreaking *Prince of Persia*, the title should be revived for a fully three-dimensional reworking. *Prince of Persia* redefined the platform genre, adding rotoscoped animation and a clever blend of acrobatics and combat. Although Mechner was only involved as a consultant this time around, *Prince of Persia 3D* is spiritually the same; building on familiar ideas, and using that extra dimension to paint a more spectacular picture of Middle Eastern magic.

Staying true to the source material brings both benefits and drawbacks. The Arabian theme remains massively underused in videogames, so *Prince of Persia 3D* instantly scores by ensuring the exotic flavour pervades every element, from the music and costumes to the dazzling locations. At the outset, the young prince must escape from a rather dull prison, but in the open air the scale of ambition grows enormously, with fantastical airships and gravity-defying structures suspended in the Persian skies.

It also helps that the game features some of the crispest texture artwork yet seen on the PC, with almost no blurring or pixellation in the splendidly coloured environment details. The prince and his opponents also impress, with fluid animation ensuring that the blend of acrobatics and combat feels just right. Fights play out well, with a small but precise range of attack and block moves demonstrating how entertaining close combat can be in a 3D title.

But just as the old *Prince of Persia* could excite and frustrate in the same heartbeat, so this is set to have gamers screaming at their machines. The predilection for lethal traps has been retained, and even though clues – such as blood marks – warn the wary, getting killed once is often the only way to learn. And while the need for pixel-perfect accuracy with an unresponsive control system annoyed the first time round, the problem is far more serious in *PoP 3D*.

It's hard to understand how a game so finely crafted in so many areas could get such a fundamental thing wrong, yet the prince is a nightmare to manipulate throughout. He turns on the spot slowly, and turns wide when running; he stops dead on grazing the edge of an object and sometimes takes a few strides before leaping, other times not. Even attempting to use mundane objects can be laborious as he'll often rotate through a full 360 degrees before performing a desired action.

The simplest tweaking could have turned *Prince of Persia 3D* into a game which, if not as groundbreaking as the original, was a match for Lara Croft's outings. Instead, it serves as a reminder of how unforgiving 3D environments can be, for designers and gamers alike.

Edge rating:

Five out of ten

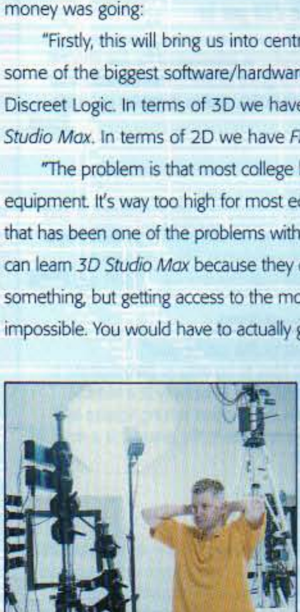
Government goes gaming: new training initiative spells hope for students

Createc, the National Film and Television School's digital media branch, has just received £500,000 for a new training initiative – The Finishing School College. It's the first time that government money has gone towards attracting and re-skilling people for the post-production and videogame industries. The move follows a wave of reports which have shown how important this area is for Britain.

John Walker is the head of training at Createc. **Edge** asked him where the money was going:

"Firstly, this will bring us into central London, where we've got partnerships with some of the biggest software/hardware manufacturers, including Avid Quantel and Discreet Logic. In terms of 3D we have the support of *Maya*, *Soft|Image* and *3D Studio Max*. In terms of 2D we have *Flame* and *Henry*.

"The problem is that most college leavers don't have access to this kind of equipment. It's way too high for most educational establishments to be able to afford, and that has been one of the problems with the industry. Most students who go into games can learn *3D Studio Max* because they can probably get hold of a cracked copy or something, but getting access to the more complex equipment is very difficult, if not impossible. You would have to actually get a job and then be trained on the job. A few years later you can start earning some sensible money. But this training initiative will allow people to be ramped up immediately because they'll suddenly have access to this technology at subsidised rates.



Walker and kit at the government-funded Finishing School College

"We also have the support of the main facility houses in central London who do loads of feature film effects. 'Lost in Space', for example, was the last big feature film where most of the post-production work was done in the UK. The post-production world is fast becoming a global industry, and the UK actually has a really good profile in that. So we're hoping that this skill centre, the Finishing School, will actually help the UK industry to take off.

"We also realise that games and film special effects are coming together in a big way. People who do games because of the quality of the software and the speed of the hardware can now do films. And people who do films, because of the similarities of using 3D for instance, can now do games. So TV, film and games are all converging, because they're all using the same kind of software and hardware. There are companies like Glassware, for instance, who are based in Soho, who do a lot of trendy pop videos with very high-end equipment, but they also work with Eidos on the *Tomb Raiders*. So they are actually using both technologies together and they're actually forming a games arm themselves.

"More and more companies who used to just do film special effects are now getting involved with games. Likewise, games people are more interested in the filmic look now. Why does a film look so good? It's usually because of the quality lighting and editing – all those things that games people didn't used to concern themselves with. So games people are really getting involved with films. There is a growing understanding of how to use effects and create tension through images. People are no longer tied down so much by low polygon counts.

"Now this convergence is only going to keep going if we start training people to take over. We need a new generation of people coming in, and most colleges can't really do that because of the expense. So we're creating this new training initiative to try and help the industry grow and to help game and film technology come together."

Money well spent, then. Walker is always looking for advice from developers on what kind of training they'd like to become available – he can be contacted at Createc on 0181 758 8619 until the end of '99. College courses will start in January 2000.

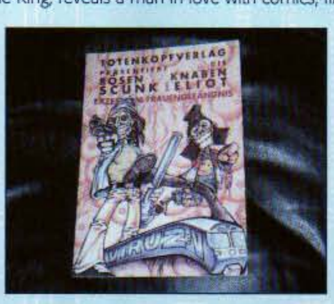
It's heartening to see some of the predictions and concepts from **Edge**'s Hooray For Hollywood feature (issue 75) actually being put into practice, but perhaps more important to see that the Government has finally woken up to Britain's success and future potential in this area.

WorkStation

During **Edge**'s recent visit to discreet monsters, the developer behind *The Real Neverending Story* (see p30), it wasn't difficult to find something worthy for inclusion here. The workplace of **Eliot Henning**, whose musical interests run from hip-hop to The King, reveals a man in love with comics, fine tobacco, and imitating drum sounds…

Elvis bust "This is made from ceramic and was bought at one of those 'we have everything' stores you find very often in Munich. These stores also carry carpets with Elvis motifs and even reprinted Jesus pictures with baroque-style gold-coloured frames made of plastic. Perfect for a romantic bedroom!"





Comic book "This is *Exzesse im Frauengefängnis*, which translates as *Excess in Woman's Prison*. It's drawn by myself and my friend, Scunk, who I've known for 13 years, with us as the two heroes. About 4,000 were printed"

Luxury smokes "I started smoking cigars about ten years ago. I prefer the hand-rolled cigar. The size and brand is not so important, but I have some favourites, like Montecristo and Cohiba. Both brands are very traditional Cuban cigars and worth the price – the larger ones here are Cohiba Esplendidos, at around 65DM [approx. £21] each"





Newspaper cutting "I'm a member of two German hip-hop groups, and I specialise in human beatbox. On my 26th birthday I DJ-ed at a party where an Elvis impersonator was playing. A local newspaper picked up on the story and ran an 'Eliot meets Elvis' piece"

Members of the development community (sane or otherwise) are invited to email WorkStation submissions to **edge@futurenet.co.uk**



The trials of a start-up developer: part 16

After co-founding Lionhead Studios with Peter Molyneux, Demis Hassabis set up his own development house, Elixir Studios. In the latest instalment of his exclusive diary, he looks back on two weeks ensconced in the confines of the Kensington Olympia

MSO and ECTS

Delightful though it may be, two weeks of London's Olympia is more than enough for anyone. During early September the entire industry decamps to London for the schmooze-tastic European Computer Trade Show (ECTS). Unfortunately for me, and unlike everyone else, I'd also spent the entire previous week there competing in the annual Mind Sports Olympiad.

The Mind Sports Olympiad is the gaming equivalent of the Olympics. At this year's event 4,000 people competed in dozens of events including chess, bridge, draughts, backgammon, scrabble, othello and go. And it's not just about traditional games. This year they had Magic the Gathering, and next year they've asked me to help them include computer games for the first time (*Civilization* World Championships anyone?).

It's a fantastic event, and I'd recommend it to anyone who's serious about their games. When I was a kid I wanted to be a professional chess player, and although I changed tack, I'm still a committed board gamer. Last year I won the Pentamind event, which is the overall event. This year I returned to defend my title.

Despite its rarefied image, Mind Sports is as competitive as any other sport. At the highest level, anything goes – sledging, shaking of tables and all manner of skulduggery is par for the course. The junior chess tournaments I used to attend had wooden boards under the tables preventing competitors from kicking each other. Don't be fooled – this is warfare.

Most people kill brain cells through drink and drugs. I, on the other hand, do so by playing too many games. At the end of this year's event my head felt like I'd spent the entire week larging it in Ibiza rather than playing chess and go. In retaining my title as overall winner, I took part in a total of 22 events.

A week later, I was back again for ECTS. It was a quiet affair this year, and a lot of the big publishers weren't there. Eidos chose to exchange the scantily dressed models of yesteryear for the discrete surroundings of Lara Croft's living room, which was tucked away on the gallery upstairs. Naturally, the room was besieged for three days by drooling blokes eager to catch a glimpse of the impossibly fit women who were sure to be in there. Imagine the crushing disappointment as the doors opened to reveal Joe and myself on our way to lunch.

Several days before the show, a professional photographer came up to do some new photos of the team. We did these in the middle of Camden and it was excruciatingly embarrassing. Crowds of people stopped and stared hoping to catch glimpse of someone famous. After much head-scratching, they realised that what they were actually looking at wasn't a Mercury award-winning band but rather 15 scruffy programmers and artists. The crowds rapidly dispersed.

"My only sadness is that I can no longer get drunk at these parties; I think people find it hard to take you seriously if they last saw you face down in a puddle"

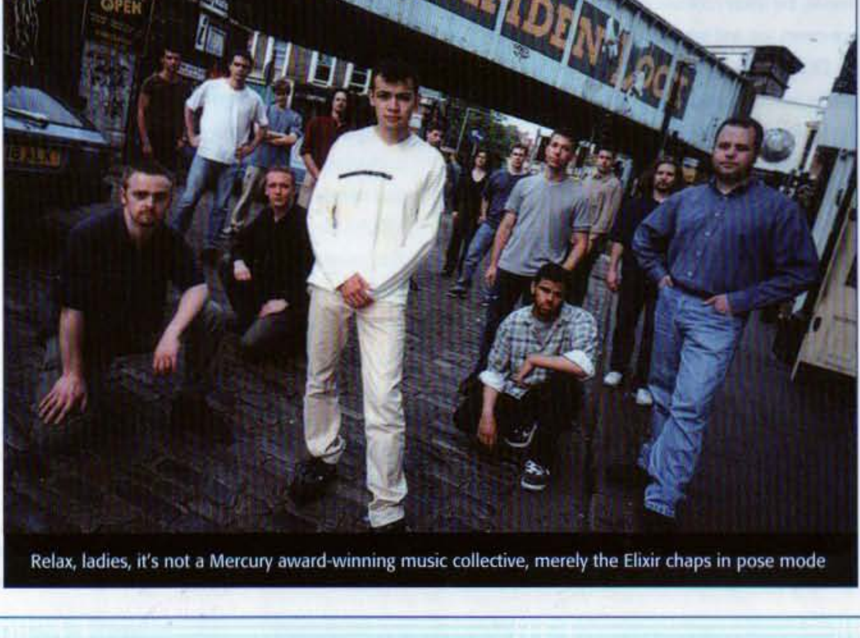
One of the highlights of the show for me was the Sony party on the Monday night. Faithless, free drink and 5,000 people made for a cool party. They also had three table football tables, and this was where the serious work was done. Forget the show – real business is conducted afterwards round dinner and table football tables. I won £60 and a publishing deal, but the highlight had to be the thrashing of three Americans 10-0 by myself. I'm thinking of moving our office table football table into the boardroom – this way I can do away with meetings and rely on table football as a means of resolving negotiations.

My only sadness is that I can no longer get drunk at these parties; I think people find it hard to take you seriously if they last saw you face down in a puddle. This doesn't seem to matter, though, as there are plenty of ready volunteers for the role of Comedy Drunk Bloke. The best one of the night was the lad I found asleep by the ten-foot-tall speaker in front of the main stage. Full marks that man.

One of the other amusing moments of the show was an argument one of my team had with his girlfriend. It was the nature of the argument rather than the event itself that caused the amusement. You see the girlfriend was looking after the press for a certain game which the boyfriend was keen to see. Girlfriend steadfastly refuses to let boyfriend in to see the game, citing him as a rival developer, at which point things kick off. Most couples row about visiting their in-laws or unfinished DIY; these two argue about computer games. Marvellous.

Throughout the show I met up with various journalists to discuss our plans over the next year. On Tuesday I had lunch with a very hungover editor of a top-selling PC magazine. I fed him gallons of vodka and Red Bull in a vain attempt to fight off the effects of a Sony-induced hangover, as he stared queasily at his bacon sandwich. The poor bloke was in no fit state to talk business, so we talked about tabletop wargames instead. It reminded me of the time a couple of years ago when another editor threw up in a cardboard box during a product demonstration on the Activision stand. With a stroke of creative genius, he blamed this on *Quake II*-induced motion sickness rather than the ten pints of lager he'd drunk the night before. It would be indiscreet to mention names, but it's a format that gets repeated year on year and will continue to feature in the future.

Roll on E3.



Relax, ladies, it's not a Mercury award-winning music collective, merely the Elixir chaps in pose mode

The trials of a rock'n'roll games publisher: part six

Brian Baglow, public relations manager at Rockstar Games, recounts the tricks and traumas involved in producing *Grand Theft Auto 2*, the sequel to one of the most successful games in recent years. This month, nose pinched, he lifts the lid on the murky world of PR and marketing...

Of course, once all the real work's done, the fairy folk come out to play: the PR people and marketing departments, the advertising agencies, media buyers and other lowlife scum who couldn't get an honest 'proper' job if threatened at gunpoint. It is a jolly time.

Now, with *GTA2* it's a little more fun than normal. After all, we're talking about a game in which you run over policemen, set fire to Hare Krishnas and abuse Elvis. Trying to sell this to people shouldn't be too hard. However, first things first. We have to decide what 'the message' is. In layman's terms, this means deciding exactly what we're going to tell you in the press, in adverts and whenever a journalist comes round for a cup of tea and a biscuit. This is actually quite important. Do we want to tell you all about the violent bits and the gratuitous flame-thrower effects? Do we want to skirt around the violence and emphasise the cutting-edge technology and sheer drop-dead sexiness of the game engine? Should we concentrate on the fab and innovative gameplay? Or should we try and use the whole rebellious attitude of the game to sell it into the lifestyle press and let goateed media types in Soho and Covent Garden persuade you that it's unbelievably bloody cool and if you don't own it you might as well kill yourself because you're obviously fat, spotty and unattractive? Tough choice...

Should we try and use the whole rebellious attitude of the game to sell it into the lifestyle press and let goateed media types in Soho and Covent Garden persuade you that it's unbelievably bloody cool and if you don't own it you might as well kill yourself?



Diesel is one of Rockstar's marketing partners for *GTA2*

In the end, the message for *GTA2* can be expressed as an amalgamation of several of the above ideas. So, from now on, *GTA* is bloody cool and if you don't own it then we'll come round and kill you with a flame-thrower. Sorted.

One of the most important decisions towards the end of the development of *Grand Theft Auto* was to appoint Max Clifford as the PR agent for the game. Max is probably one of the most well-known and controversial PR agents in the country, and it was thanks to him that *GTA* featured quite so heavily in the national press, from the *Daily Express* ('Ban This Sick Filth!') to the *News Of The World* ('SICK CAR CRIME BOSS IN TOT SLASH SHOCK!'). This approach clearly wasn't going to work again. You're never as shocked the second time around, and you can't build up a whole franchise of games telling people how controversial they are.

Instead we looked towards the music and lifestyle press – the slick, glossy mags which feature well-dressed, famous people doing exciting things and, if necessary, acres of female skin. This meant appointing a PR agency. Someone who deals with rock stars and sports celebs. Someone who can tie up interviews with daytime TV chat shows and get your brand name tattooed onto the forehead of a 'Big Breakfast' presenter. With *GTA2* we want to let important, opinion-forming people know about all the sexy little bits and pieces that are in the game – the music, the movie, the sheer coolness of being able to steal an ice-cream van and run over a copper's head.

Of course, it helps when you're involved with some well cool people from the worlds of music and fashion. Towards the end of this year, the *GTA2* club nights will be taking place at some of the most seriously cool clubs in the country. It's all been organised in conjunction with Moving Shadow, *GTA2* and Rockstar, and Diesel Clothing.

Julia Warrington, Moving Shadow's talented and popular PR manager, said, "It was an inspired move to team Moving Shadow Records with Rockstar Games. Music and interactive entertainment have always been closely associated, and the sheer credibility of Rockstar, combined with the underground vibe of the drum'n'bass scene, via Moving Shadow will conspire to make this club tour one of the most exciting to happen this year." See you in NY Sushi, then...

Then there's marketing, which is like PR but without the clever bits. Marketing *GTA2* is a tricky business, since you have to walk a fine line between conveying the game in all its destructive and anti-social splendour and getting cool adverts which will not get banned from every magazine, billboard and bus shelter in the country. Games advertising is generally (and rather amusingly) crap, obvious, blunt and sometimes crude. *GTA2* had to be different, had to be edgy. It had to be something completely different from the usual brain-numbing, rendered crap that clogs up your favourite mags every month.

Rachel England-Brassy, Take 2's UK marketing manager, said, "We had to create a campaign that told people straight away what the game was all about. And we wanted to do that without resorting to pictures of people breaking into cars, car chases or any of the usual clichés that seem to be so prevalent. This meant we could explore a few more unusual areas than normal."

One of the ideas involved getting members of the public to incriminate themselves in a number of illegal but highly amusing ways. This wasn't really a problem since it was only marketing, not real life, but after a number of high-profile arrests and a threat from several MPs, the campaign was withdrawn.

However, you can get away with almost anything on the Internet. "We came up with the idea of creating a number of small programs which could be attached to normal email messages," says England-Brassy. "Each one is going to give people a little bit of info about the game. You'll be able to run people over, shoot a redneck in the face, smash up innocent pedestrians – all good old-fashioned *GTA2* fun. Give people something nice to pass onto their mates."

The release of the game is now looming large. The programming and testing are finished, the packaging complete – even the BBFC is happy. All that remains is to convince the public at large that *GTA2* is the game that they not only want, but that they must and will have – at any cost. They have to be convinced that missing this game will leave them friendless and infertile, that come judgement day there will be the *GTA2* owners and everyone else. Let's face it, it's not an area of the games business that gets much press (well, you know what I mean...). It's a cold and lonely place where good men are killed like dogs and talentless hacks thrive and prosper. Still, it's better than a real job.

In closing, I must add that *GTA2* is out to buy now at your local games store.

JAMBO SAFARI

SEGA VENTURES INTO JUNGLE TERRITORY FOR ITS LATEST INNOVATIVELY STYLED DRIVING GAME

Developer: Sega R&D#3
Release: Out now
Origin: Japan











Once an animal has been roped, you must keep one hand on the wheel as the other controls the lasso. A tension meter tracks the danger of snapping (above)



A number of different park rangers are available for selection, although the variance in their performance levels is negligible

In the wake of *Crazy Taxi*'s success, it's little surprise to see Sega further exploring such whacked-out driving territory. Clearly cut of different cloth than the likes of *Sega Rally* and *Daytona USA*, *Jambo Safari* leads you into the jungle in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, urging you to collar various species of animals to populate your safari park.

Adopting a premise somewhat similar to that of Taito's aged game of crim-hunting, *Chase HQ*, key animals are targeted as you hurtle towards them. The target works on a semi-automatic basis, growing in size as you approach the beast, and players must snap out a lasso by operating a gearshift-style stick next to the steering wheel. As the animals stampede like the dinosaurs of 'Jurassic Park', capturing them can be tricky, demanding that you carefully adjust your driving line as you attempt to reel the animal towards the vehicle, taking care to monitor the tension of the rope as you would a fishing line. Making the task easier is the game's sparsely populated terrain, which gives you plenty of room to manoeuvre as you wrestle with wildlife.

With over 200 species of animal included, *Safari* is clearly not a halfhearted production on the part of Sega, despite its rather odd leanings. As another of the company's burgeoning array of Naomi titles, a Dreamcast conversion is assured, further broadening the already diverse appeal of the format.



Brief descriptions of the terrain and animals you'll encounter precede each of the levels





The Naomi board allows for a fair amount of detail on the numerous types of wild animal that populate the game

SPAWN: IN THE DEMON'S HAND

CAPCOM ONCE MORE INDULGES ITS COMIC BOOK-TO-VIDEOGAME CROSSOVER FASCINATION

Developer: **Capcom**
Release: **TBA**
Origin: **Japan**











The default view offers a close, over-the-shoulder view, although it pans out when the action hots up. Players can choose between a selection of characters



The levels have suitably comic book-style titles. Indeed, the game's entire content has been approved by *Spawn* creator, Todd McFarlane

Capcom has often brought comic book heroes to the arcade world, most famously with characters of the Marvel universe, but now the newer and more fashionable Spawn character is the focus of the company for its latest project. Running on Naomi technology, *Spawn* sets out to seamlessly meld elements of fighting games and shoot 'em ups, presenting a thirdperson, over-the-shoulder view of the action.

Graphically, *Spawn* pushes Sega's 'economy' coin-op hardware as hard as any other title to date, and stands firm alongside homegrown output such as *Out Trigger*, Todd McFarlane's designs comfortably lending themselves to transition to the videogame realm and the excesses it affords, allowing for an enormous selection of attacks. Guns, swords, spears, grenades and landmines all make an appearance, many of which should be immediately familiar to the comic book's fans.

Gameplay takes place over ten levels, running through earthly reality locations to an eventual hidden evil world. Each level is constructed as a full-3D arena-style area, with stairways allowing for multilevel play.

Though the Spawn character is the game's focal point, Capcom has included over ten playable characters for selection, some good, some bad. Further combatants are set to be hidden away in the final game, too.

Despite being one of the first titles to make use of the Naomi architecture's network capability for fourplayer action, standalone *Spawn* cabinets will also be operated, which should give the game a chance to make an impact within the walls of the UK's more conservative arcade establishments.





Four players came split into two teams of two in the Team Battle mode, while Battle Royal sees everyone kicking lumps out of everyone else

FERRARI F355 TWIN

SEGA SCALES DOWN ITS SUPER-REAL RACING SIM TO MAKE A MORE DREAMCAST-FRIENDLY PROPOSITION

Developer: **Sega R&D#2**
Release: **Out now (Japan)**
Origin: **Japan**





***Shenmue*'s 'Passport' disc allows *F335 Twin* players to view their performance on a Dreamcast at home, via VMS downloads**

Having enjoyed considerable success in Japan in its original three-screen format, Yu Suzuki's supreme racing simulation now enjoys a new life as a singlescreen coin-op, a concept brought about chiefly in order to provide linkup play between two or four players. While the deluxe version will remain in active service, dual networks of the scaled-down version are intended to reignite the classic Sega social gaming aspects of the likes of *Daytona USA*.

Of perhaps greater interest to Dreamcast owners is the coin-op's VMS compatibility, which replaces the paper performance printout of the deluxe model. Now, having completed a race, DC owners can plug memory units into the coin-op and download performance data which can be taken home and analysed on a TV screen being fed the requisite software, which represents your driving (replicating the full car model) against a simplified version of the track on a blue backdrop. Put simply, this feature is an *F355* completist's dream come true.

Played within the confines of a single screen, *F355* does not suffer as much as might be expected. The ratio has been adjusted to allow a wider view, and this cut-down iteration suggests that the original's 'surround' display is more luxury add-on than fundamental component.

Via VMS compatibility, Sega has further bridged the gap between coin-op and console with *F355*. Moreover, the eventual home version is set to enjoy a wealth of longevity-bolstering embellishments.



The close-bonnet perspective is still the best view if you want a realistic sensation of speed and an accurate feeling of control over each vehicle



Onscreen dials and speedometers are unusually placed at the bottom of the screen, which may prove distracting to gamers used to seeing indicators pushed into the top corners of the screen







SAMBA DE AMIGO

SEGA FOLLOWS KONAMI'S DANCE ROUTINES ALL THE WAY TO LATIN AMERICA FOR A NEW RHYTHM-ACTION TITLE

Developer: **Sonic Team**
Release: **Out now (Japan)**
Origin: **Japan**





Shaking a pair of maracas may not be as physically taxing as manoeuvring a pair of skis, but some UK arcadegoers may remain equally reticent to sample Samba's delights, if only for fear of ridicule

There was an unusually high number of coin-ops jostling for the 'oddest concept' award at the recent JAMMA event in Tokyo, with Sega leading the pack with the likes of *Typing of the Dead* and this, the first rhythm-action title from Yu Suzuki's Sonic Team.

Following in the steps of Konami's established BeMani series, instead of the breakdancing-cum-Twister gameplay of *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Samba De Amigo* requires you to mimic a maraca-toting monkey to the beat of Latin American music.

Visually, the game is bold and simplistic, with loud images reminiscent of those in *Um Jammer Lammy*. Clearly this isn't a move to follow the semi-serious scratching action of the *Beatmania* series, but rather a simple exercise in childlike fun.

Reports suggest that other coin-op producers within Sega expressed concern over Sonic Team dabbling in the arcade scene, but, judging by the crowds *Samba De Amigo* drew at JAMMA, they had little reason to worry.









Simplistic graphics reflect the lighthearted nature of the game, although this seems something of a waste of Naomi's power. The dual maracas set up does limit the difficulty of possible combinations, though proceedings can still get surprisingly hectic

SUPER F1 CIRCUS

As the Formula One season draws to a close, gamers prepare to relive their favourite highlights with titles from the ever-growing racing sim genre. Today's graphics may push realism, but Edge remembers what was possible in the realm of 2D







Despite this being 1992, Williams didn't always win, thanks to the early innovation of virtual car tuning

In a world of polygons and realistic dynamics, it's difficult to believe that some of the best gaming interpretations of F1 can be seen in Nichibutsu's *F1 Circus* series for the Mega Drive and Super Famicom. Never released in the west, it's easy to understand why most gamers ran a mile when they first spotted these titles at their local importer. Even then, the top-down graphics looked simplistic, while audio was basic at best, and physics were only loosely approximative. Hardly the sort of thing you might invest £60 in, then.

And yet *F1 Circus* captures the essence of Formula One excellently. Made before the FIA introduced a series of castigatory regulations designed to make the sport safer and more TV-friendly, *F1 Circus* delivers all of the atmosphere associated with early-'90s F1: slick tyres, fast circuits, ludicrous slipstreaming, and drivers like Senna, Prost, Berger, Mansell, Schumacher and Alesi (although not all the versions of *F1 Circus* were fully licensed).

Developed in conjunction with the Lotus F1 team, *Super F1 Circus* imitated its real-life counterpart to an (at the time) unusual degree: all the marshal flags were present, car elements deteriorated, dynamic weather demanded nail-biting realtime pit strategy (do you go in for a set of wets or risk staying out and hope the rain stops after a couple of laps?), and retirements were common. Which all meant races could be lost on the first corner (spin off the track into the nearest tyre barrier and it was game over) – a seemingly harsh touch, perhaps, but endearing to diehard F1 fans.

Ultimately, catching a powerslide, judging pit stops or slipstreaming past a competitor in *F1 Circus* provided more excitement than anything the majority of today's polygon-laden equivalents can muster.





Harsh but fair, *Super F1 Circus* was a less-accessible version of Nichibutsu's similarly styled coin-op driving experiments







Despite crude (yet likeable) visuals, *F1 Circus* captures the excitement of Formula One with remarkable aplomb; it's more than just dynamic weather and a pit crew

Manufacturer: Nichibutsu | 1992 | Developer: In-house | Super Famicom/Mega Drive

EDGEVIEW

The videogame world never stands still, riding the breaking wave of advancing technology. In this regular column Edge puts the industry's progress in perspective with a look at yesteryear's headlines: five years ago this month



Edge issue 15, December 1994



Neo-Geo power without the pain of Neo-Geo software prices. But did you buy one?

As the CD storage revolution prepared to take full hold, the intro of **E**15 ruminated on the potential the medium might hold. Imagine, **Edge** pondered, the prospect of PlayStation titles such as *Ridge Racer* clocking in at £25 – half the price of SNES carts of the day. (Of course, Sony's prelaunch hype machine had been working overtime at this point: the first wave of PlayStation games infamously costed as much as carts. Not even **Edge** could cut a swathe through such bending of truths.)

Of more interest to the most hardcore of readers, however, was the news that a CD-driven update of SNK's four-year-old Neo-Geo console was waiting in the wings for an official UK release. The prospect of *Samurai Shodown* for £45, not £200, suddenly became very real.

Jaguar *Fight For Life* jostled against PlayStation *Toshinden* in **E**15's Prescreen section, the merits of the two beat 'em ups proving strangely prophetic for the host consoles in question.

Yet Atari remained confident. After all, mailorder ads in **E**15 offered a Jag and a copy of *Cybermorph* for a mere £230. What hardcore gamer could've resisted such temptation? (Ahem.)









Clockwise from top left: to some gamers, this new format warranted more attention than the PlayStation; Edge's first in-depth look at retrogaming; a 10-20%-complete Saturn *Daytona USA*; *Return Fire*, a rare 3DO classic

Did they really say that?

"It's doubtful that some of these new polygon systems... are going to be able to do [3DO *Road Rash*'s 3D horsepower and 2D character animation] very well" – **RJ Mical**, 3DO VP

Did Edge really say that?

'While that's fine for catching up on [Neo-Geo] classics like *Magician Lord* and *Nam '75...*' *Classics?* Sure, the videogame industry was in a rut in 1994, but things weren't *that* bad

Testscreens (and ratings)

Magic Carpet (PC; 9/10), *Ecstatica* (PC; 8/10), *Micro Machines 2* (Mega Drive; 8/10), *FIFA International Soccer* (3DO; 7/10)

PIXELPERFECT

Every gamer has occasional moments of sparkling excitement, be it the first time *Speedball* booted up, or completing *Sabrewulf*. Here, original Bitmap Brother Mike Montgomery recalls the nightmare-inducing 3D RPG, *Dungeon Master*

Over ten years later, occasionally I still have this recurring dream. I'm trapped in this long dark corridor. It smells of damp and danger. I smell of sweat and fear – but there's no way back. Only forward. I move slowly towards the end of the corridor, turn the corner and... [SFX: *Niyyyyit! Niyyyit! Niyyit!*] *AAARGHHH! It 's a HUGE PURPLE WORM HITTING ME, HITTING ME, HITTING ME, SLASHING, TEARING...* and then I wake up.

Dungeon Master, eh? It can really screw you up. It stole three weeks of my life back in 1988 and the occasional good night 's sleep ever since. We were doing the rounds of publishers – things were a bit less corporate then – and a certain guitar-playing development manager was trying to get us to sign *Speedball* with him. "Take a look at some of our other stuff," he said, and gave us a copy of *Dungeon Master* on the Atari ST, the first game to really get inside my head.

Three weeks later, we came back totally shagged out. We signed – I mean, we hadn't had time to go anywhere else. Well, that and the fact that he promised never to play the guitar in front of us again..."







A videogame legend apparently enough to permeate the slumber

Marantz RC5000 Universal Remote Control

■ *£280 ■ Contact: 01753 680 868

While it's great to fill your house with hundreds of shiny black boxes to deliver the best in home cinema entertainment, you'll soon find yourself swamped under a tidal wave of remote controls. Simple events like sitting down to watch 'Seinfeld' will be blown out of all proportion as you frantically search for the correct controller for your telly while desperately seeking the hi-fi remote to shut off the CD player.

Unless you want to develop octopus arms, you could do worse than shell out £280 for the latest Marantz Universal Remote. The RC5000 is a vision in chunky champagne and means that you can chuck your expansive remote collection out of the window.

Already preprogrammed for a shedload of Philips and Marantz kit, you can expand the RC5000's horizons by switching it to learn mode, pointing an original remote at it and pressing all the buttons you want to transfer. Then it's just a case of customising the touchscreen to include all the controls you want and programming a few macros so one touch turns the telly, DVD player and amp on before tuning them all to the correct settings.





Casio E-105

■ *£500 ■ Contact: 0208 450 9131

PDAs just get better and better. A few years ago we were as happy as Larry when our Palm Pilot told us not to forget Auntie Beryl's birthday on its low-res screen. Now, it's a different story. We want colour, we want multimedia, and we want gimmicks. Casio's E-105 has all these.

With a 240x320 TFT colour LCD screen and 32Mb of RAM, the *WinCE* machine also handles movie trailers and video clips thanks to its Mobile Video Player. Best of all, a special encoder lets you play back MP3 files.

The package is completed with an integrated monaural microphone and speaker, Type II CompactFlash slot and eight-hour Lithium battery which copes remarkably well with the power-hungry screen.

* These are typical High Street prices, accurate at time of going to press. Manufacturers are no longer obliged to provide recommended retail prices on certain consumer electronics products.

Tissot Bodyguard Watch

■ *£150 ■ Contact: 01703 646 800

Save hiring a Kevin Costner lookalike to constantly watch your back (and let's face it, who would want that?), there's only one real way to keep yourself safe nowadays: personal alarms.

Now, these are great when you're walking through a dark alley with not a care in the world, but if someone does attack you, you'll no doubt be left scrabbling about for the rip cord just as the bad guy makes strawberry jam of you. What you need is the Tissot Bodyguard Watch, an attractive timepiece that doubles as an alarm.

When in trouble, just click the two side buttons and a 105-decibel bellow will scream out. To give you an idea how bloody loud that is, try standing by a passing Inter City 125 train and you'll almost experience the same levels of sound.

Peace of mind can be yours for a mere £150.



Pioneer MEH-P9000R ICE System

■ *£650 ■ Contact: 01753 789 789

Think your in-car system's pretty damn fine? Well, think again, because it has nothing on the new Pioneer unit that's getting motorheads in a terrible spin.

After ten years in the lab, the Pioneer men in white coats have released Organic Electronic Luminescent displays on to an unsuspecting world – and the results are pretty impressive. Stick the MD player on demo mode and you'll be greeted by wonderful 3D cityscapes, complete with visiting UFOs, all in glorious technicolour. Thankfully, this eye candy calms itself down while you're driving so that you can keep your eyes on the road.

Soundwise, the system is better than most, with its direct sub drive sending all the bass to the rear speakers while the front handles either 50, 80 or 125Hz frequencies.

As if that wasn't enough, an extra 500 quid will secure you the optional Digital Audio Broadcast unit, allowing you to listen to your favourite artists in all their digital glory. Heaven.









Edge has attempted to state prices wherever possible, but for up-to-the-minute information, check adverts in the national press or contact your local consumer electronics dealer.

Game merchandise, Akihabara style

Japan: Ever wondered what videogame journos take to game exhibitions with them? Well, don't bother – it doesn't get much more exciting than a notepad, pens, a tape recorder, business cards and possibly a laptop. Far more interesting, however, is what they bring with them on the return trip. Take, for instance, a recent visit to the Tokyo Game Show which saw **Edge** subsequently attempt to cram the whole of the Akihabara district into its medium-sized shoulder bag and then proceed through customs hoping that the constant beeping and trailing tangle of cables didn't give the game away...

'Beep, beep'

You should be able to spot the following: a PlayStation lighter 'borrowed' from an SCEE representative; *Shenmue* promotional materials (cups, notebook, pen, press pack), *Namco* T-shirts, notepad, coloured crayons, playing cards, *Pac-Man* keyring; imported Hong Kong DVDs; a Super Famicom Jr. complete with games (*Super Metroid* for £3, anyone?); an army of Game Boy Colors, again with games (interestingly, Japanese GBCs don't come in the summer range of colours the EU got last June, though a translucent model has yet to make it to the UK); Pikachu toys; Chocobo figurines, a SquareSoft T-shirt; videogame magazines; assorted keyrings, *Gran Turismo 2* stickers; two elusive yet captured PocketStations; inflatable *Space Channel 5* aliens; *Puyo Puyo* plastic hand-clapping device





Highlights from Edge's bag

Having once sold his SNES in order to afford a subsequent console, a certain member of the **Edge** team has finally been reunited with the pleasures offered by Nintendo's 16bit box

Harder to find, even harder to share. Sony's PocketStation may never see a western release, but when a new shipment hit Akihabara stores **Edge** just had to grab a couple

You could pay £70 for a UK Game Boy Color or you could get the exact same machine in Japan for £35. It's simple economics, really

On the other hand, imported Hong Kong DVDs are not particularly cheap, but if you like your HK action flicks uncut you have little choice but to get them from countries with more lenient censorship policies than the UK

More power to UK pockets

UK: SNK has just made its Neo-Geo Pocket Color handheld officially available to British gamers, and **Edge** has been putting test machines through their paces over the last month. And, with a clearer and more convincingly colourful display than the GBC, SNK's unit is a delightful piece of kit. The only problem at present is a lack of killer titles for the title. Indeed, twoplayer linked *Neo Turf Masters* has proved the most popular game in the **Edge** office. Yes, that's a *golf* title. More games next month.





Neo-Geo Pocket Color titles come in groovy packaging (left), replete with twee Japlish text. Colour definition (below) is better than on Nintendo's GBC





Win a Neo-Geo Pocket Color

UK: SNK, in conjunction with new UK-based online videogame retailer Nlightning Entertainment, is celebrating the launch of its new handheld format in the UK by running a competition for **Edge** readers. Ten first-prize winners can win a console plus a game of their choice, while 20 runners-up will receive Neo-Geo T-shirts. Simply answer the following three questions:

1. What does SNK stand for?
2. What was the first Neo-Geo cartridge release?
3. How many *Super Sidekicks* titles have been released?

Email your answers directly to Nlightning Entertainment by visiting www.enlightning-ent.com.








Some of the key launch titles include a gloriously accurate *Pac-Man* conversion, and a surprisingly workable translation of *Puzzle Bobble*, both **Edge** favourites




DataStream



Number of PS2 development kits initially being sent to America: **1,000**
Percentage of PlayStation1 development kits that were allocated to Japanese developers: **71%**
Number of games Sega of Germany predicts will be available for Dreamcast by the end of 2000: **300**
Number of servers worldwide carrying *Quake III* test: **1,100**
Number of hardcore PC gamers in the States: **3m**
Number of casual PC gamers in the States: **50m**
Percentage of all videogame retail revenues currently generated by Nintendo products in the US: **58%**
Percentage share of the German PC market taken by Westwood when *C&C: Tiberian Sun* was released: **74%**
Percentage of total company turnover that EA predicts its online division will be generating in 3-4 years: **20%**
Percentage of current EA turnover generated by its online division: **2%**
Number of the 18 launch Dreamcast games in the States that use Microsoft's *WinCE* OS: **0**
Number of Dreamcasts sold in the US within two weeks of launch: **514,000**
Number of months until Sega predicts it will post a profitable financial year: **17**
Percentage of Matrox 3D card customers who would buy another Matrox board: **80%**
Half-year exchange losses by Nintendo attributed to strengthening yen: **$472m**
Sony's percentage share of the PC software market: **0.1%**
Average unit price of UK software (all formats): **£35**
Console titles shifted by GT Interactive, July 1999: **43,051**
3dfx's share of the UK PC 3D accelerator market: **50%**
Current UK market share of Sega Saturn: **0.2%**



FILA BRAZILLIA
A Touch Of Cloth
(Tritone)

At the point dance loses its righteous hedonism and actually becomes fun sit Fila Brazillia. One of the '90s' best-kept secrets, they have released six albums so far on the bizarre but ballsy Pork Recording label. But this time around they're doing it for themselves on their own label. Eclectic to the point at which even that term means little, Fila Brazillia's music is laid back, tinged with a touch of jazz and spiced by odd beats. And the best track, 'Spores', sounds something like a minimalist kicking back and chilling out. Beautiful.



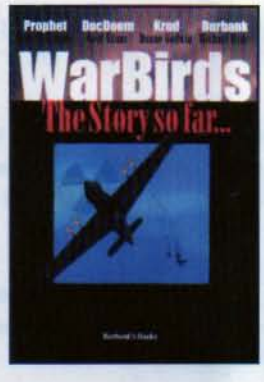
GORKY'S ZYGOTIC MYNCI
Spanish Dance Troupe
(Mantra)

Despite recently losing a founder member as well as their record label, Gorky's, together with the Super Furry Animals, continue to prove that Welsh music can contain subtly, melody and imagination, despite the Stereophonics' efforts to convince the world otherwise. And 'Spanish Dance Troupe' is as album as good as as any to demonstrate their willful determination to push popular music as far as it will go. Some tracks are hard going, but the majority will be among the prettiest tunes you'll hear all year.



STATE RIVER WIDENING
State River Widening
(Rocket Girl)

With the likes of Fridge and Add N To [X] already forcing the pace of music without voices, the dreamily named State River Widening have picked up the baton, removed its electronics and created their own atmospherics. In particular their use of a traditional range of instruments – acoustic guitar, wurlitzer, marimba and vibraphone, when combined with cool drummed rhythms, makes for an incredibly soothing, if slightly melancholic, experience.



Author: **Various**
Publisher: **Burbank's Books**
ISBN: **0 9585194 9 8 4**
www.senet.com.au/~mhyde/burbanks_books_simulator.htm

WARBIRDS: THE STORY SO FAR...

Ultima Online and *EverQuest* may be hitting the headlines as the titles changing the face of online gaming, but there are plenty of examples that are more interesting. Take, for example, *WarBirds*. It's been around in various forms since 1989 when it was called *Air Warrior*. Back then only 250 people played it. Today over 100,000 PC and Mac pilots are registered, with 10,000 flying every month. But, as with all communities, there have been both triumphs and flames along the way. This book is its history-cum-bible.

First gaining prominence following its evolution into *Confirmed Kill*, the game became the place to fly and fight in World War II aircraft. But external problems dogged it, most notable when the then-named Interactive Magic merged with developer ICI in 1997, taking over what had been renamed *WarBirds*. This situation recently came to a head with the departure of most of the original *WarBirds* team to form their own company. And yet through all this, the online community has spread as far afield as Japan, Russia and Finland, and pilots have continued to fly in their thousands, reliving historical scenarios and building friendships. The game is now so sophisticated that it contains over 50 types of aircraft, as well as ships, tanks, and radar-directed anti-aircraft guns. Yet technical qualities aside, its strength is the way it has integrated individual gamers into a virtual world. And it is their stories that makes this book fascinating. This is crucial reading for anyone attempting to understand the dynamics of building an online gaming community.



Author: **Arnold Pacey**
Publisher: **MIT Press**
ISBN: **0 262 16182 6**

MEANING IN TECHNOLOGY

Arnold Pacey takes an unusual premise for his book, particularly when you consider that it is being published by one of the most important technology universities in the world, MIT. 'Meaning In Technology' is a personal book in which Pacey argues that human activity, even science, can not be adequately described factually, only existentially. It's a point of view many of his colleagues would consider treacherous for a scientist to hold but it's one which he constructs with a certain amount of skill and grace. Examples include the so-called 'eureka' effect when problems are solved intuitively, seemingly without the conscious action of the brain. Yet beyond this, Pacey's bigger target proves to be the whole reductive mindset. Worried our postmodern consumer society is creating a world in which everyone will prefer to live in virtual reality, he argues for technologies that are more people-centred. Interestingly, though, there's no mention of the Internet.







INTERNET
Site: Yak's Zoo
URL: www.magicnet.net/~yak

Fans of *Tempest 2000* may wonder what happened to its creator, notorious hippie codefiend Jeff Minter. A visit to this site will bring them bang up to date. Herein, the hairy one spins yarns of trips to the US through his involvement in VM Labs' Nuon, speaks of his (understandable) love of curry and (borderline dodgy) relationships with animals, while mixing in his love for all things techy. Much of the site is out of date, and updates are notoriously irregular (must be all that weed intake), but what's here is entertaining, lively stuff, and unusually literate for such a full-on coder. Plus, Minter's been around the block a few times, which lends some credibility to his ramblings.

VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH BA1 2BW (email: **edge@futurenet.co.uk**)

I've been reading with interest the details of Sony's PlayStation2 console and am a little concerned about the impact of its proposed backwards compatibility. Although I do not work within the gaming industry (being simply an avid gamer), even I can see danger lurking on the horizon.

First of all, let's be honest here: the software industry is about making money. Game producers and chief executives may say that their primary concern is to entertain, but it does help if you can make buckets of cash into the bargain. When a third party comes to develop a game for the PlayStation2, they are not going to ignore the potential for sales amongst current PS owners. What I think could become the norm is the production of games for both the current PlayStation and the next-generation machine on the same CD. PlayStation owners can buy and play the game, and next-generation owners can have the benefit of playing a 'remixed' version.

The question is, how much of a benefit is that? Games development will be made with the current technology in mind (appealing to the lowest common denominator), with the next-generation owners having to make do with what is offered. These 'remixed' versions are likely to feature clearer and smoother graphics, with maybe a few extra levels thrown in (if appropriate). This is not going to make me want to fork out the cash to buy this wonderfully powerful new machine. But how long will this state of affairs last?

When a console is nearing the end of its shelf life, presumably software companies can track the fall of sales easily. The decision on when to stop development for this console can be made when sales fall below a certain level. In this way a company can maximise sales on a large installed user base but avoid wastage by releasing games to a dwindling audience. This may be much more difficult to quantify for Sony's PS and PS2, though, if dual-format games are released on a single CD or in a single package.

How will anybody be able to gauge the split in the sales between the differing PlayStation owners? I understand that the sales of the PS2 console itself will of course be available, but it will be very difficult to ascertain how many current PlayStations are still in active use.

I'm sure the geniuses at Sony have already thought of all this and have barriers in place to prevent this happening – I hope so, anyway. Does **Edge** have any insight into this matter to put my mind at ease?

Mick Carson,
via email

The backwards-compatibility issue really shouldn't be such cause for concern, because developers will always seek to push technology to its limits. PS2-only titles will outweigh dual-format releases by an enormous margin.

'As soon as Nintendo released one revolutionary game **(*Mario 64*)**, everyone copied it and soon no one could tell the **difference** between the PlayStation and the **Nintendo 64'**



Will PS2 owners be lumbered with mere PS1 updates? (See letter from Mick Carson)

Doesn't anyone in the games industry take notice of the past? History is repeating. In the late-'70s/early-'80s, Atari came from nowhere and created a brand new home console market. It got fat, greedy, and, worst of all, arrogant. It assumed it had the market all to iself, just as a fat little plumber was about to change videogames forever. Nintendo again rose from pretty much nowhere, concentrated on the quality of its games, and set unmatched standards of playability in the process. Everyone bought a Nintendo. Then the company got fat, lazy, etc. Again, it thought the 16bit market was its own, until Sega released the Mega Drive. Of course, Nintendo didn't lose the way Atari had, but it was forced to compete in a way it had not expected. Skip forward a few years and Sega is about to announce the Saturn. It figures it can knock out a sprite powerhouse that could easily emulate *OutRun* or *Rad Mobile* – this although its internal AM2 division is working on 3D extravaganzas such as *Virtua Racing*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Daytona USA*. It quickly learned of a Sony-developed console that would be vastly better at generating its own 3D games than the Saturn. What's more is that Sega's rival, Namco, has signed on to develop. Sega does another one of its rush jobs and knocks out a badly designed piece of junk; it's difficult to program for and not really up to doing 3D. Sony comes along and does well, but for how long, with the much more powerful SG-powered Ultra 64 just a year away?

The videogames world is a fickle one. In **Edge**'s own estimation, 'on a scale of ten, if Saturn is one, PlayStation three, then the Ultra 64 is at least a ten'. Hmm...

As soon as Nintendo released one revolutionary game (*Super Mario 64*), everyone copied it, and soon no one could tell the difference between the PlayStation and the Nintendo 64. The rest is history. We have all been anxiously waiting for the PlayStation2, and now it's here it seems history

repeats again – Sony has got fat, greedy and arrogant. Sure, very nice console, but what does it look like – a CDTV or a 3DO? With this approach, Sony is neglecting the very people who made it – *the kids*. Sure, PS2 is a lifestyle accessory, but in a year from now, will consumers be able to tell the difference between the Dreamcast and PS2? Sony has got the next-generation battle far from its own way. It's turned its dedicated gamebox brand into a set-top box. I think, if Sega fails (with its continual mess-ups) then Nintendo will be back with a vengeance after the failure of the Nintendo 64. Or, of course, the new kid, Microsoft, could steal the show. The war is far from over.

Nick Ralph,
via email

As the age of the 32bit console draws to a close, and game producers scrape the last dregs out of the barrel that is the PlayStation, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the future (if that's possible).

Sega's Dreamcast is almost upon us; the NGPS is now a reality; and Nintendo is expected to make an announcement on its next-generation console incredibly soon. The only one of these big three which doesn't have a black mark on its record is Sony. Its PlayStation was a remarkable example of how to rightly market a console, whereas the Saturn and the N64 were not. The Saturn made the mistake of sticking to 2D graphics when the world wanted 3D. The Saturn appealed to Sega's hardcore fans, whereas the PlayStation appealed to everyone. Sony's masterstroke was to make videogames cool again. It created the market that exists today, and now the other console manufacturers want a slice. Sega made a brave but necessary leap of faith by announcing its console first. The world was impressed, to a degree, but many people believed, and still do believe, that Sega had lost touch and was destined to fail. I disagree. Sega seems to have learned from its mistakes, and the vast amount of gamers who have preordered a Dreamcast is proof of that. Sega is taking a leaf from Sony's book and is making its console 'cool'. Launch games like *Trick Style* and Sega's arcade conversions of *Sega Rally 2* and *Virtua Fighter 3* are more appealing to the 'after-pub gamer', thus allowing Sega to nudge in on the market created by Sony with games like *Wipeout* and *Micro Machines*. That said, Sega is also appealing to the younger generations of gamers with titles such as *Sonic Adventure* and *Pen Pen*. Sega seems to be going for a stranglehold on all aspects of the videogaming industry, just like Sony.

This brings us on to Sony and its next-generation PlayStation. At the time the NGPS was announced I was extremely excited at what seemed to me to be the ultimate console. However, now I'm not so sure. For starters, the NGPS is not a mere console, it is a multimedia machine. This suggests to me that Sony is turning its back on mere games and focusing on attacking the PC market. I'm not sure if this is a wise move. If it pays off, then Sony will be laughing all the way to the bank. If, however, Sony's attention to the games is not as great as it should be, then it is going to lose out dramatically. The NGPS could well be something of a lost dog, not good enough to challenge the higher end of the PC market and too expensive and lacking in games to be accepted by the videogamers of today. Then again, I may well be wrong about all of these things, and perhaps it is too early to tell, which leaves us with just Nintendo.

Nintendo made a huge mistake with the release of its 64bit console by constraining itself and its developers to the tired, old, expensive and small cartridge. This decision forced SquareSoft to turn to the PlayStation to create *FFVII*, a game which went on to be the most successful game of all time. Despite this, there have been many good games on the N64 – *GoldenEye*, *Mario 64* and *Zelda*, to name but three. Nevertheless, the N64 was always considered a 'kid's console' by the majority of gamers, and although it sold reasonably well it was easily eclipsed by the PlayStation. This was a shame, but hopefully the mistake will be rectified by Nintendo's new console. In my opinion, the Nintendo is the dark horse of this equation, and I believe that if Nintendo sticks to what it knows best then it will have a sure winner.

'The NGPS is not a mere console, it is multimedia machine. This suggests to me **that Sony is** turning its back on mere games and focusing **on attacking** the PC market. I'm not sure that **this is wise move'**

Overall, the big three seem to have gone in very different directions with their new consoles, and whether the gambles they have taken will work depends on the other two. All I can say is the future's there for the taking, but only for one of the three.

Harry Slater,
via email

Nintendo is late to the party again, and it will cost the company dear. Sony kicked its arse last time, and it's seemingly polishing its boots for more. N64 is on life support in Japan and Europe, and Nintendo should be on its knees thanking God that it has Game Boy and *Pokémon*, otherwise… It's playing smoke and mirrors again with Dolphin, but no one really believes it will deliver a new machine next year. In 2001, maybe, with a 'Third World' Europe release in 2002. Unfortunately, the N64 may not last that long. Maybe Nintendo will dump IBM for Apple (NitMac, anyone?).

Sega's DC seems to have flopped already in Japan, but it had a great launch in the States. It bungled the Euro launch (delays, no Net play until April, unoptimised conversions, poor controller), but should still do well. Fast, hi-resolution graphics on a big widescreen telly in Dolby should convince many, as long the software publishers get behind it, otherwise it will end up just like N64 with only firstparty titles.

Which leaves Sony carrying the ball. History shows that it's difficult to maintain leadership in the race, but on paper the machine sounds good, and it has certainly wooed over the development and publishing community. Let's hope it doesn't get that arrogance that

comes with being number one. Still, there is always Bill and Microsoft…

daSilva,
via email

A couple of thoughts on the new PlayStation2. Doesn't it look lovely standing on its end?

Anyway, picture this: you've just recently bought a PlayStation2, as you've heard that as well as a games console – I don't care what they say about 'new forms of entertainment', games is what they will be! – you will be able to play 'these new DVD film things' on it (no one seems to have noticed the lack of MPEG2 decoder in the specs). So, having gladly parted with your cash, exchanged the kids' PlayStation (after all, the guy in the shop said that it was 'backwardly compatible') and bought a few films, you settle down to watch one with your wife. Suddenly the door bursts open and in tears your pride and joy who wants to play *Tekken* on the new PlayStation. Bit of a problem it all being in one box, eh? He/she can't even play it on the portable TV in their room.

Also, PlayStation2 CD-ROMS! What happened to delivering gigabytes of game worlds to the hungry gameplayer via DVD? Perhaps the modem was left out because 'investing in low-end technology makes no sense', and not because it pushed the price up and made the box an ugly shape!

Just who does Sony think it is with rumours that PlayStation2 will only be available through Sony shops? Perhaps the necessary markup would put it out of a competitive price range, so it intends to sell games through its online network, effectively cutting out the high-street retailer. Didn't they help make the PlayStation what it is today?

Okay, that's my rant over. Looking forward to your PlayStation2 coverage and reviews of perfectly good games that end with 'but just think what will be possible when Sony's new machine is launched!'

Matt,
via email



Adam Heyes ponders what more *Pokémon* can do for Nintendo once Game Boy comms take hold

Sony's intention is surely not for PlayStations to be traded in, merely relegated to kids' bedrooms while the new console makes its impact underneath the family television in the living room.

As far as PlayStation2 hardware becoming available only through official Sony outlets goes, that's not going to happen. It seems you spend too much time hoovering up idle gossip from the Internet.

Regarding your comments about forthcoming reviews, you've got **Edge** mixed up with another multiformat mag, haven't you?

'When people are complaining about a lack of emotion in computer games, **Nintendo unveils** the main hardware side of its **whole 'create and** nurture' ethos, **which must** be a good thing'

Martin Rowse (Letters, E76), how mistaken you are. For a start, the Game Boy mobile phone adaptor – you've got the totally wrong end of the stick there, mate. The adaptor is to enable the Game Boy to be linked to the Internet, not to simply make it into a big mobile phone. With the writeable technology of the Game Boy, plus infinite space to store downloads, who knows what Nintendo will be able to do? You could swap and fight with *Pokémon* trainers all over the world. Download new levels for any of the three up-and-coming new Game Boy *Zelda* games. When you take into account the Game Boy Camera, it is sort of a little version of the 64DD, which you also criticise. This is the most innovative piece of kit to have come from any hardware producer since the NES. When people are complaining about a lack of emotion in computer games, Nintendo unveils the main hardware side of its whole 'create and nurture' ethos, which must be a good thing. Even if only 100,000 get to play it, it will still start the ball rolling and stand Nintendo in good stead for the next round of the console battle. The fact that we will never see it on our shores can only be lamented.

In a time of '*FIFA '99: September Edition*' and '*Tomb Raider 17* – now with 45% more boobs', do you not think new ideas – any new ideas – should be welcomed if true progression is to be made? But if truth be told, it is always Nintendo leading the way with the new and exciting ideas. Just look at what it has contributed to date: the D-pad, the first console modem (ditto keyboard, mouse and disk drive), shoulder buttons, analogue control as standard, Rumble Pak, microphone, the Game Boy, the Game Boy Camera, the platform game (2D and true 3D)… I could go on, but my point is made. The thing is, without Nintendo leading the way, the videogames industry would never have survived for this long, or grown to this size.

It has already been said that the NGPS will use the standard PS controllers. This is supposedly to continue brand loyalty (ever hear that mentioned in the days of the Spectrum?). Really, there is no need for them to change to facilitate prettier versions of the same old games. There is also the fact that Nintendo hasn't unveiled its new controller, so nobody has a template to work from.

Ever hear the saying 'more form than substance'? I think it is relevant here. While Sony and Sega are beavering away with their marketing, it will be Nintendo that's tinkering with the next groundbreaking addition to the computer games portfolio. And, after all, it consistently makes the world's greatest videogames, which is good enough for me.

Adam Heyes,
via email

True, Nintendo's contributions to the videogaming world are unmatched by any other player. Equally, however, it has made some catastrophic decisions in recent years. Time is crucial for Nintendo, and it doesn't have much of it left…



Next month.
Videogames as art?

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